

*American Studies*

PAPERS IN HONOUR OF  
ROBERT E. SPILLER

# INDIAN ESSAYS



Bombay:

*Research Centre*

IN  
AMERICAN LITERATURE

*Edited by*

SUJIT MUKHERJEE &

D. V. K. RAGHAVACHARYULU

Popular Prakashan



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## FOREWORD

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WHEN THE American Studies Research Centre organized a Symposium on American Literature in December 1966, and planned to bring out the papers as a volume of *Indian Interpretations of American Literature*, Drs. D. V. K. Raghavacharyulu and Sujit Mukherjee, who were among those invited to participate, improved upon the idea. Why not make a *festschrift* of it, enlarged with contributions from Indian scholars who had been students of Professor Robert E. Spiller, and present these essays to him in honour of his seventieth birthday? *Spiller 70* was the book, they, themselves former students of Dr. Spiller, had in mind and would have promoted were ASRC not quarrying the same field. We joined forces, ASRC to look to the production, Drs. Raghavacharyulu and Mukherjee happily agreeing to do the editing. The result is *Indian Essays in American Literature*.

That is a better title. *Indian Interpretations* might have suggested an attempt to find influences and parallels where none exist. There is an Indian approach, no doubt, as a recent USEFI-sponsored seminar at Nainital on "The Indian Response to American Literature" made clear. There are traditions, insights, points of view and sensibilities which only the Indian scholar and no one else not similarly conditioned can bring to the task of literary criticism. But the scholars in the present collection claim no unified view. However culturally conditioned, they also speak as individuals from highly personal angles of vision. It is our good fortune that, after a long allegiance—for some of them—to English literature, they have found American literature rich enough to engage their serious interest, in the same

way classical scholars once turned to English literature itself, long considered a vernacular upstart. The Romans interpreted the Greeks; the French have written the best histories of English literature; Indian scholars may see American literature, a later vernacular, from an ultimate perspective. They bring old skills to new subject matter, opening their own minds in the process and experiencing, like Keats, a sense of discovery as they stand on their own peaks in Darien in the literature of the New World.

Professor Spiller has had a good deal to do, however unwittingly, with creating such an interest and in disciplining Indian scholars to deal so professionally with problems of American literary history, criticism, and culture. He has taught a number of them over the years at the University of Pennsylvania. His books are widely read and consulted in India. *The Cycle of American Literature* is known to every student taking the post-graduate paper in American literature and has been translated into a number of regional languages. The comprehensive *Literary History of the United States* (the familiar LHUS) which he, with others, edited is to be found in every university library. *A Time of Harvest*, the Voice of America Forum lectures on contemporary American literature which he arranged and edited, has been reprinted in India and is a popular presentation item of the U. S. Information Service. Chapters from *The Third Dimension : Essays in Literary History and Criticism* are finding their way into Indian anthologies.

At last, in 1962, he himself came to India, though briefly, to take part in a momentous Workshop for Teachers of American Literature and History conducted by the U. S. Educational Foundation at Mussoorie in May. Out of those sessions came a special issue of Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah's *Literary Criticism* wholly devoted to American literature, a landmark in Indian academic interest in the subject. And out of those sessions came the idea of what within two years materialized as the American Studies Research Centre, about to be rechristened as the Indian Institute of American Studies. By good luck, I was there at Mussoorie and shared the excitement and promise of those proceedings. By good luck, I am here now with the venture that, in its initial stages, owed much to Professor Spiller's wise

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counsel and steady support. I am delighted at the course of events which has made it possible and so appropriate to present him with a collection of essays written by Indian scholars and sponsored by the Centre. Like so many good ideas, the idea for the Centre could have died aborning. But today, the Centre's growing library of Americana, its expanding reference and loan services to institutions and individuals alike, its programme of study grants and fellowships, and its intensive summer courses for the teachers of postgraduate papers in American literature and history are evidence of life and vigour.

Books by Indian scholars on American subjects still appear only spasmodically in the lists of Indian publishers. Indian reprints of American works there are in growing numbers, but original publication is still rare. An early work was V. Ramakrishna Rao's *Emerson, His Muse and Message*, published by the University of Calcutta in 1938. The number of doctoral dissertations on American literature under way in Indian universities (see Appendix A) suggests there will be more, at least more academic, publication. Articles are more frequent, but fugitive, with a few gathered into critical collections like the casebooks and sourcebooks now flooding the United States. Professor K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *The Adventure of Criticism*, with nearly a third of it devoted to American literature, is an exception. And more and more, the papers read at the seminars in American literature being sponsored by USIS and USEFI may be counted on to appear in published proceedings, like Bombay's *Renaissance in the Twenties*.

The present volume marks a double contribution as an encouragement to both original scholarship and indigenous publication. The contributors present an interesting academic profile : five of them have studied or lectured in the United Kingdom, seventeen in the United States, and seven of these under Professor Spiller. They exhibit both the regional and national face of India : they are genuinely multi-lingual as the Indian is bound to be and, coming from every part of the sub-continent, they have written, many of them, on regional literatures as well as on English and American, and frequently in the regional languages. They are natural comparativists, at home in several worlds. The chronological range is as wide as the geographi-

## Foreword

cal : they number among them elder literary statesmen with established reputations on the one hand and untried lecturers, their doctoral dissertations barely done, on the other. Among the reverend signors, there is at least one vice-chancellor and a number of deans of faculties, principals of colleges, and heads of departments.

The plan of the book is somewhat accidental. The subjects, left to the contributors, arrange themselves, as it turns out, into a sequence of speculation, exposition, explication, and critique, with phrases for the division headings derived, without too much contriving, from Professor Spiller's own writings. Two essays at the outset, in "A View of the Horizon," speculate about Indo-American literary relations, followed in "The Landscape of Authors" by expositions of the work of individual writers ranging from Edward Taylor to Arthur Miller, followed in turn, in "The Context of Texts," by explications of single works from Thoreau to Faulkner, and concluding, in "The Unfolding Cycle," with essays and critiques of broad themes and genres—poetry, drama, criticism, literary history. For all its unplanned character, the collection amounts to more than a miscellany : except for the major omission of any essay on the Negro in American literature, the essays achieve scope and balance and faithfully reflect current pre-occupations among Indian literary scholars. The prevalence of Henry James should surprise no one.

The way of the scholar is private, but his work has public import, and making it publicly available requires collective effort. My thanks, then, to the contributors, the editors, and the publisher for their model collaboration—and to the public, our ultimate collaborator, who must receive and judge the result.

Hyderabad  
June, 1968

WILLIAM MULDER  
*Director*  
*American Studies Research Centre*

## ROBERT E. SPILLER : A PERSONAL NOTE

---

THE Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra thus directs the initiation of a student in ancient India :

उत्तरोऽग्ने प्रह्मुख आचार्योऽवतिष्ठते, पुरस्तात्प्रत्यङ्मुख इतरः ।

अपामञ्जली पूरयित्वा ' तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यमहे ' इति पूर्णेनास्य पूर्णमवक्षायरति ॥

"The teacher should station himself to the north of the sacred fire facing towards the east. To the east of the sacred fire facing toward the west should the student station himself. The teacher should then fill with water the cavities of the hands of himself and of his student and with the formula *tat savitur vrnimahe* . . . should make the water flow down upon the full cavity of the student's hands by means of the full cavity of his own hands."

Our initiation in modern Philadelphia by Professor Robert E. Spiller failed to follow these directions. Besides, the only available fire in the classroom either on the second floor of College Hall or in the basement of Bennet Hall was concealed in the ancient radiator; the only ostensible water was the spluttering in the steam pipes. Nevertheless, at the end of a course of lectures with him or when a year's seminar work had concluded, we did feel as if we had indeed performed the grave injunction of that classic text : "On the region of the student's heart the teacher should place his hand with the fingers stretched upwards and say, 'Into my vow I put thy heart; after my mind may thy mind follow; with single-aimed vow do thou rejoice in my

‘speech; may God Brihaspati join thee to me.’

Professor Spiller, we are sure, will turn his characteristic merry twinkle in the eye on us when he reads these solemn sentences, wonder to himself when on earth did he ever perform such prestidigitations, and firmly disclaim the responsibility of having aroused such sentiments in the hearts of Indian students who have “taken” his courses at the University of Pennsylvania. Yet, he must accept part of the blame, for simply being so accessible to us. Among the many problems facing an Indian student on entering an American university for doing doctoral research is that of finding a research guide. The mere choice of a research topic is only the beginning. Thereafter come the hours, days, months of distress until a professor will give you a hearing, show some interest in your topic, perhaps suggest some further reading, and then only turn himself into that Prince Charming of doctoral students, a Supervisor. The hazard affects fellow American students equally. But he can wait, you can’t. Your scholarship tenure gets shorter and shorter; but he can join the Peace Corps if nothing else. And even after you have been betrothed to your Supervisor, the learned professor may get an ACLS grant or a Fulbright fellowship to Peru or simply find a better job on the west coast where salaries as well as the winters are more salubrious.

None of these problems attended the prospect of “working” with Professor Spiller. He must be among the rare mountains who come to Mahomet. That Spring Term seminar of his entitled “Cultural Interchange with America” must have produced, over the years, more dissertation topics than any other single seminar course. You didn’t sign up for this seminar, you were “invited” to join it. And we suspect—regardless of whatever behind-the-scene checking was done to see whether we could read, write, and speak English—that very often little more was required by way of qualification than being a foreign student in the English Department at Penn. Thus we gathered for those weekly two-hour sessions—Asian, Australian, African, South American, British, black, brown, yellow, pink, white—each riding his own hobby-horse to death under the gentle flogging of

Translations reproduced from *Sources of Indian Tradition* (Motilal Banarsidas, 1963), p. 228.

*A Personal Note*

Professor Spiller, whose attention to or concern for our subjects never wavered, no matter how incomprehensibly we spoke or read our own brands of English. The final session would be held in his home in Swarthmore, where Mrs. Spiller would patiently wait for the last paper to be read before she let us loose amid the eatables and drinkables. Next week you got your grade and, if it was anywhere near respectable, you ventured to ask Professor Spiller whether there was any possibility of your doing further work on your seminar paper. And then you were on the road.

Both of us have travelled that road, though separately. We did not know each other either before or during our studies at Penn. Yet when we first talked about (actually, corresponded) putting together a volume of essays by Indian scholars on American literature, we simultaneously thought of presenting the volume to our common mentor. At first we had planned to confine the effort to former Spiller students only. But this would have been both parochial as well as unrealistic. American literature is no longer a coterie interest in India now. Another objective we had considered originally—namely, that of covering all the special Spiller territories—has had to give way to the range and variety of interests displayed by our contributors.

Our contributors have been exceptionally patient and co-operative. They represent this country, as required by hoary tradition, from Himavant to Kanyakumari; and at least two have sent their offerings from across the seas. Even if we had all the contributors we wanted, writing on all the subjects we preferred, the problem of getting all this into print would have remained. This is where Dr. William Mulder stepped in and undertook those responsibilities which would have been quite beyond our resources. The modest account he gives elsewhere of his role in this project does no justice at all to the vital part he has played in making this volume a reality.

One last word. Since we began working on this project, we have come to share a common vision perhaps not unrelated to Professor Spiller's ideas—namely, that a study of American Literature has opened up infinite possibilities in the study of Indian Literature as a distinct and analysable cultural phenomenon.



*Robert E. Spiller : A Personal Note*

nōn for our sub-continent. Should that vision ever obtain substantial form, it will perhaps be a worthier *dakshina* to our guru. This modest tribute is but an assurance of that coming effort.

1  
Puna/Aurangabad  
June, 1968

SUJIT MUKHERJEE  
D. K. RAGHAVACHARYULU





ROBERT E. SPILLER

Photo: Faculty of English—University of Pennsylvania.

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ROBERT ERNEST SPILLER was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on November 13, 1896. He did all his college studies at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, from where he received his A.B. in 1917, A.M. in 1921 and Ph.D. in 1924. After a year (1920-21) as Instructor at the University of Pennsylvania, he taught at Swarthmore College from 1921 to 1945, before returning to the University of Pennsylvania for the rest of his regular teaching career upto 1967. At Pennsylvania, he was Chairman of the American Civilization Department (1947-49, 1951-53, 1955-57) and Felix E. Schelling Professor of English (1961-67). He has also taught American Literature at various Universities both at home and abroad, including Duke, Harvard, Columbia, Southern California, Michigan, Minnesota, Colorado, Oslo (Norway) and London (King's and Bedford Colleges). He holds a D.Litt. from Thiel College and a Dr. Phil. h.c. from the Christian Albrechts University, Kiel (Germany). He was an early Chairman of the American Literature Group of the Modern Language Association, and was also a founder and President of the American Studies Association. He has been an editor of *American Literature* and of *American Quarterly*, and an associate editor of *Etudes Anglaises* and of *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien*. During the summer of 1962, he visited India to attend the American Literature Workshop at Mussoorie organized by the United States Educational Foundation in India. At present he is Honorary Consultant in American Cultural History to the Library of Congress, U.S.A.

*The following is a Select list of Dr. Spiller's writings in  
chronological order :*

- The American in England during the First Half Century of Independence.*  
New York : Holt, 1926.
- (Editor) *Fenimore Cooper, Gleanings in Europe, France.* New York :  
Oxford, 1928.
- (Editor) *Fenimore Cooper, Gleanings in Europe, England.* New York :  
Oxford, 1930.
- Fenimore Cooper, Critic of His Times.* London : Williams & Norgate,  
1931.
- The Roots of National Culture* (anthology). New York : Macmillan, 1933.
- (Editor, with P. C. Blackburn) *A Descriptive Bibliography of James Fenimore Cooper.* London : Bowker, 1934.
- (Editor) *James Fenimore Cooper, Representative Selections.* American Writers Series. New York : American Book Company, 1936.
- (Editor, with J. D. Coppock) *Satanstoe.* American Fiction Series. New York : American Book Company, 1937.
- (Editor) *Esther*, by Henry Adams. Gainesville, Florida : Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1938.
- (Co-editor) *Tahiti*, by Henry Adams. Gainesville, Florida : Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1946.
- (Co-editor with Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Sedel Canby, Richard M. Ludwig) *Literary History of the United States.* New York : Macmillan, 1948. Revised edition, 1953, with supplementary chapter, "Postscript at Mid Century". Third edition, revised, 1963.
- "Benjamin Franklin : Promoter of Useful Knowledge," in *The American Writer and the European Tradition*, edited by Margaret Denny and William H. Gilman. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1950. pp. 29-44.
- "The Growth of American Literary Scholarship," *Edda* (Norway), January 1951.
- Introduction to *The Last of the Mohicans*, by James Fenimore Cooper. New York : E. P. Dutton and Co., 1951.
- Introduction to *Crumbling Idols*, by Hamlin Garland. Gainesville, Florida : Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1952.
- (Edited, with introduction, bibliography and notes) *Ralph W. Emerson, Five Essays on Man and Nature.* New York : Appleton, Century, Croft, 1954.
- "Henry James," in *Eight American Authors*, edited by Frank Stovall. New York : Modern Language Association, 1956. pp. 364-418.
- "Franklin on the Art of Being Human," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, C, 4 (1956), 304-315.
- Introductory note to *The American Democrat*, by James Fenimore Cooper. Third edition. New York : Knopf, 1956.
- The Cycle of American Literature.* New York : Macmillan, 1955. Paper-

- back, Mentor, 1956. Translated into Japanese, Korean, Italian, Swedish, Portuguese (Brazil), Arabic, Hindi, Urdu; special edition in English published in Czechoslovakia for circulation in Europe.
- "The Influence of Edmund Wilson : The Dual Tradition," *The Nation*, CLXXXVI, 8 (1958), 159-161.
- "American Literature in British Universities," *Bulletin of the British Association for American Studies*, 9 (1959), 21-23.
- (Editor, with Stephen E. Whicher) *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume 1, 1833-1836*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1959.
- "American Studies, Past, Present and Future," in *Studies in American Culture : Dominant Ideas and Images*, edited by Joseph J. Kwiat and Mary C. Turpie. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1960. pp. 207-220.
- "Value and Method in American Studies : The Literary Versus the Social Approach," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien*. Ed. IV. Heidelberg : Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1959.
- (Edited, with a Preface) *Social Control in a Free Society*. The Benjamin Franklin Lectures of the University of Pennsylvania, Sixth Series. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960, pp. 11-14.
- "The Use of Old Sources in New Ways," *The John Carter Brown Conference, a Report of the Meeting . . . on the Early History of the Americas*. Providence : The John Carter Brown Library 1961. pp. 19-28.
- (Edited, with Eric Larrabee, for the American Studies Association) *American Perspectives : The National Self-Image in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1961. Preface, pp. v-vii; "Literature and the Critics," pp. 36-58.
- "The American Literary Dilemma and Edgar Allan Poe," in *The Great Experiment in American Literature*, six lectures, edited by Carl Bode. London : William Heinemann, Ltd., 1961, pp. 3-25.
- (Edited, with an introduction) *A Time of Harvest : American Literature 1910-1960*. New York : Hill and Wang (American Century Series), 1962. Preface, pp v-vii; "The Critical Rediscovery of America," pp. 1-8.
- Preface to *Notions of the Americans*, by James Fenimore Cooper. Two volumes. New York : Unger. 1963.
- "Is Literary History Obsolete?" *College English*, XXIV (1963), 345-351.
- "Literary History," in *The Aims of Methods of Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, edited by James Thorpe. New York : Modern Language Association, 1963. pp. 43-55.
- "Afterword" to *The Pioneers*, by James Fenimore Cooper. New York : New American Library, 1964.
- (Edited, with Stephen E. Whicher and Wallace E. Williams) *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume II*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press. 1964.
- (Edited, with an introduction and bibliography) *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. New York : Washington Square Press, 1965.

- *The Third Dimension : Studies in Literary History*. New York : The Macmillan Company, 1965.
- James Fenimore Cooper*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1965.
- Introduction to *The Pathfinder*, by James Fenimore Cooper. New York : Limited Editions, 1965.
- Introduction to Cooper's *The Pioneers*. (Signet). New York : New American Library, 1964.
- (Edited, with a Preface and explanatory notes) *The American Literary Revolution, 1783-1837*. Garden City, New York : Doubleday & Co., 1967 (Documents in American Civilization Series). Anchor Books.

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INDIAN ESSAYS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

*Papers in honour of*

ROBERT E. SPILLER



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I  
A VIEW OF THE HORIZON

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## AMERICAN LITERATURE : PARTLY AN INDIAN VIEW

SISIRKUMAR GHOSE

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I AM NOT an expert on American literature and it is the privilege of the expert to expose and elaborate. I shall, therefore, try to perform a more humble but perhaps necessary task within my means; briefly, to present a point of view likely to be shared by a number of readers who come from a somewhat different background than the American, and with a different set of values. This may be considered as an Indo-American essay, or if I dared to pronounce it, an essay towards Indo-American understanding.

To begin with, I do not take literature in isolation as an autonomous activity. What know they of literature who *only* literature know? All creative activity forms part of a wider if invisible order of experience and civilization. It is not a happy hunting-ground for the literary specialist, writing more and more about less and less. The position I am taking is by no means new. In his *Main Currents of American Thought*, what else did Parrington do? But my emphasis, such as it is, will naturally be different from Parrington's, but not too different from that of the "other America" or Americans, a "counter ideology," stopping somewhere waiting for you. A revaluation of American experience, including its literature, in terms of certain recognized and well-established principles, which I can only take for granted rather than elaborate, is both possible and necessary. That, I am prepared to admit, is one of my assumptions. It is



an assumption which American writers have helped to clarify.

Here, for instance, is a simple statement from Spiller : "The civilization of the United States differed sharply from that of Europe in that, until very recent years, it was constantly in a state of movement and flux." A slight change would make my meaning clearer : substitute "throughout" for "until very recent years." American society is still in flux. It is a fact which calls for judgment, hardly to be dictated by literary fashions. Sometimes, of course, judgment can be quite beside the point, little more than an expression of a prejudice or preference. For instance, the complaint, open or implicit, that the United States lacked both a Middle Ages and a Renaissance. But obviously this is carping criticism. One cannot criticise a culture, or an individual, for what it does not have or profess to give. On the other hand, an undue emphasis—repeated, as in Daniel Boorstin's *The Americans : The National Experience*—on the all-American character of American experience, in terms of "just what was American," is but to take a short view, to throw things out of focus, and ignore the need for new and larger loyalties.

It is to be provincial in a new key. The desire for identity is understandable. True, American literature has developed qualities which no Aristotelian canon can easily explain or account for. But in the contemporary context of One World such self-centredness—from which, alas, every historical culture suffers—is more a disvalue than a value. And why ? It disturbs the human image and reality, and our responsibility towards the future, and of the writer as world citizen. In his essay "Universal Literature" (*Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, II, 1936) it was Tagore's contention that only that which is universal has a right to survive. If the arts and literature of any country are not allied to these emerging or enduring values, I am unable to accord them any high place in the scale of human values, except as interesting cases of crisis, or for purely historical or literary survey. Maybe by such standards very little literature produced at any period or place will survive. But the little that does is our concern and source of standard. And so I propose—briefly, too briefly for the purpose, since what happens to the American psyche and society, its arts and letters, is likely to affect the rest of the world—to take an overall look at the American scene in terms

of certain ideas and principles inherent in the American experience or adventure of ideas. The most important of these is the idea of freedom and wholeness, the integration of impulses, races and cultures, of science with conscience, in brief, maturity. If this means looking at it from a loaded or an Indian point of view, I plead guilty. I do not know how I can help it.

Watching the abundant literary harvest of the United States, what strikes this outsider—an interested outsider, may I add?—is that American literature, like the society it shapes and reflects, has rarely known any norm or tradition for long. Swaying too easily between “schools of hope” and “schools of despair,” the extraordinary if inevitable mobility of her life, America has not yet completed the process of discovering herself, of finding a serene or secure image of herself. For her the crisis of identity is not yet over. In fact, it has taken on larger, more complex dimensions. As the eminent Indo-American, Lila Ray, recently pointed out, rootlessness has become a fashionable American disease. Rootlessness and restlessness. Pearl Buck says the same thing, a little differently: “We Americans are the restless of all nations. When visitors speak with wonder of the ceaseless hurry and activity which is such a part of the American temperament, I am not surprised. For were we not naturally restless, none of us would be Americans at all. There would be no America. Restlessness, is, then, our essential nature.” But restlessness such as this can be both an asset and a liability. There is a time for restlessness and there is a time for reckoning. In the words of Bradford Smith (*Why We Behave like Americans*), where all is shifting and changing, there is need for some kind of measuring stick. •

The restlessness has gone hand in hand with a spirit of revolt and adventure, of individual or non-conformist conscience. And yet, a paradox, there has perhaps been little real criticism of the modern roots of its culture: industrialism and technology—no *Brave New World* or *1984*, only *It Can't Happen Here* and *Walden Two*, that apogee of science fiction. “Muckrakers” there have been, in plenty, but they do not exhaust the “criticism of life,” a more serious occupation. For instance, Upton Sinclair’s *exposé* of the Bomb lies forgotten while the scientist Oppenheimer’s confession, “The physicist has touched sin”, has been

treated almost as an un-American activity. A man like Léwis Mumford, alarmed at the moral nihilism of the age and its growing cult of death, has been forced, or has decided, to withdraw within himself. Even to this day, poets and dramatists, Arthur Miller and Robert Lowell, for instance, have been known to decline White House invitations. These gestures, whether laudable or irritating, remain a symptom of the malaise of an affluent but anguished society. The Beats are perhaps its latest tragi-comic catharsis and "absurdity" has become the *bon mot* if not the *mot juste* of rebels without cause. Or is there a cause?

It is not suggested that American literature, or the men who write it, lack a sense of criticism or self-criticism. After all, "who does not realize that self-satisfaction, as an American mania, is only exceeded by the mania of self-criticism?" Perhaps there is more satisfaction to be derived from such writers (not quite popular, nor quite literary) as Richard Weaver, Lewis Mumford, Rachel Carson and Thomas Merton than from the accredited literary lions. Indeed, most of what I have to say derives from American sources. It is this heritage, now somewhat in the shade, that seems to me more significant. In *The American Mind*, Henry Steele Commager has pointed out: "The dominant note in literature [has been] critical . . . all but unanimous repudiation or protest and revolt has been dominant in American literature since Emerson and Thoreau . . . Rarely in the literature of any country have the major writers been so sharply estranged from the society which nourishes them." That is the point. But where has the protest and revolt led? We live at a time, writes Norman Cousins, when people seem afraid of themselves, when they prefer a hard, shiny exterior to the genuineness of deeply-felt emotion. Sophistication is prized and sentiment is dreaded. The literature of the day is remarkably void of themes of natural goodness or even the potential goodness of man. The values of the time lean to a phony toughness, casual violence and cheap emotion; yet, we are shocked when youngsters confess to having killed and tortured, because they enjoyed it. Mercy and respect for life are still the basic lesson in taming the human animal, including the American Adam.

In our own days, I know quite well, one does not expect or demand ethical uplift or a readymade solution from the arts,

and it is always foolish to suggest what a nation's literature *ought* to be. All the same, one has a right to expect some kind of symbolic illumination of the condition of man, some worthwhile image of man and society, not necessarily of the well-adjusted man or an euphoric society. In the last analysis, the writer is perhaps not unlike the theologian or therapist, and the cure is in terms of integration. It means that "at some time or the other a man must be capable of facing himself," and this can seldom be done if one is on the run, always. This, perhaps, is where Indian aesthetics and its psychology of the witness self come in, a philosophy of emotions and culture which can be appreciated better in terms of its opposite. It is not an old-world philosophy but essentially renewable. Listen to Camus: "If I try to taste and understand the delicate flavour that contains the secret of the world, it is again myself I find at the heart of the universe." Camus is but echoing, unconsciously, the mystical Vedantic insight which is inescapable, because it is the heart of the aesthetic experience, *yukya-viyukta dasa*, the bonded-liberated state, as the critic Visvanatha put it. This is to be *rasena triptah*, to quote the Vedas, the bliss of being, which modern society and psychology and literature lack as part of their common inner vacuity.

We must strike once more for human dignity, said Dos Passos. It is in terms of that effort or challenge, beyond both "paleface" and "redskin", towards the recovery of human dignity, some unachieved unity of transcendence with technique, know-how with know-why, that America's real history will have to be written or re-written. This, I submit, is the heart of the American Dream. Or is the Airconditioned Nightmare all we know, and need to know? ("The American Dream: A Tragic Illusion" is one of the courses offered by the Free University of New York.) This effort towards recovery and restitution will determine whether America, her civilization and literature, is going to be the biggest breakthrough in history or, as Whitman sometimes feared, the biggest failure in time. We have, everywhere and always, to choose between leadership in crisis and being waylost. The world must become whole, or there may be no world at all. And America is at the storm-centre of that crisis, perhaps not of her seeking. World leadership is not without price. It is not yet cer-

tain whether America represents the Prometheus of One World or Dr. Faustus of No World. As Julian Huxley has tartly commented, the ultimate deterrent might easily turn into the ultimate detergent.

These sombre questions, ultimate, unavoidable, boring, arise because America and the American way of life and letters have been escalated into world leadership. These create problems of value that go far beyond the American frontier. Out of the crisis of American conscience, in her society and literature, must arise the image of the universal man, *l'uomo universale*, *sarvabhauma*, world loyalty and world culture which the free world will freely accept as America's contribution to our common destiny and the future of man.

Humanity with all its fears  
With all its hopes and future years  
Is hanging breathless on thy fate.

America *was* promises, one of her poets had written. She still is, perhaps now more than ever before. In a letter to a friend, Eugene O'Neill had written from his sick-bed that the great theme of all literature was, after all, a search after meaning. Truer words he never wrote. For this is *the* predicament of the artist today. As the hero of *The Sun Also Rises* says: "All I wanted to know was how to live." It is an unavoidable question which all civilizations have to answer, or perish.

But if there is little reason to flatter ourselves, there is perhaps less for despair. The meaning is in the struggle to create meaning. Of this, modern literature, including American, is an evidence. Once before, in a crucial moment of her history, the still unfinished Civil War, America had gone through her "ordeal of unity." Now the ordeal includes the world. Never was challenge so acute. But, in a deeper view of things, a challenge is also an opportunity. If, in the present crisis, America and her men of letters are able to give us the reconciling vision, a symbolic illumination of the modern dilemma, that will be America's finest hour. Only by dealing with the discontinuity between the life of consciousness and the outer life of society—and, as Kenneth Rexroth reminds us, our civilization is the only one in history

whose major artists have rejected its dominant values—will America have succeeded in defining her experience and selfhood. Not for nothing did Scott Fitzgerald define the American temper as a heightened sensibility to the promises of life. Only with this enhanced awareness (*chitta vistara*) of her own and the world's problems and possibilities, "a tremendous new challenge," will the cycle of American literature, "rich in spiritual conflicts," reveal its larger orientation towards the United States of Man. If this involves "a philosophy of vital participation in the world community" as part of "the last and greatest vision of the American potential," that is just as it should be: "Earth's resumé entire floats on thy keel, O ship."

In the light of such a hope and vision "too many writers today seem reluctant to address themselves to the larger visions of which man is capable. They pride themselves on their ability to see life for what it is, but the result is actually a counterfeit realism that ignores the more meaningful aspects of life. One wonders whether such writers have been preoccupied with human neuroses to the virtual exclusion of the human potential; whether in the desire to avoid easy sentimentality, they may not have divorced themselves from honest sentiment. Indeed, so far as the United States is concerned, we have been passing through what later historians might regard as the Dry-Eyed Period of American Literature. Instead of reaching for the grand themes that can give literature the epic quality it deserves, too many writers have been trying to cut [their works] down to the size of a psychiatric case history." In such a context of civilization in crisis it was a pleasure to hear Arthur Miller speak recently in defence of ancient values and insight: "And I say that literature is probably the only 'discipline' in which it can be emotionally proven that without moral vision people must truly perish—and with them literature itself." The "moral vision" is part of the American experience which needs to be emphasized with skill and sensitiveness. Shall we not contribute, Emerson's voice floats back, shall we not contribute our share to this enterprise, then? I am content to repeat that question, as the heart of the American Heritage, confident that the answer will be 'yes'.



# THE SEARCH FOR LITERARY IDENTITY

D. V. K. RAGHAVACHARYULU

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## I

THE EXPERIENCE of American literature has undoubtedly added a new dimension to our intellectual life and enriched our international consciousness. Welcome as this development is, in pursuing American literature as an academic discipline, the "Indian Scholar" must guard himself against developing any critical angularity that may possibly arise from a heavily loaded Indian point of view being applied to American literary works. Already, there is some evidence of our having over-reached the legitimacy of critical liberalism in our frequent, pious assumption that the great American books can be automatically absorbed into our indigenous sensibility because of their sheer universality. We have had, recently, many commentaries, dissertations, and papers devoted to the study of how Indian thought and philosophy have penetrated the American literary mind, particularly in the works of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. At least some, if not all, of these studies are carried away by the impression that every ontological or metaphysical insight in American works is traceable to an Indian analogue. Such an "assumptive fallacy" may perhaps spare us the trouble of "an irritable reaching after" of the literary facts. However, it leads to a sad neglect of the empirical determinations of American literature as the product of a specific American experience conditioned by its own specific environment. Looking for an Indian presence in American



literature may be occasionally useful in ordering our own critical awareness, or in clarifying and further illuminating an intimately felt artistic perception. But, surely, the tendency cannot be permitted to develop into an occupational obsession in our approach to American works. It is perhaps time now to turn our attention to the uses of American literature in another direction. For, the historical emergence of a national literary identity and imaginative tradition in America holds many instructive lessons for us in India in our attempt to discover, or reconstruct, a similar defining framework for Indian literature.

An exaggerated interest in parallelism of themes, motifs, and ideas tends to oversimplify, or flatten out the peculiar paradoxical tension, the particular creative inner contradiction, within the specific culture from which a work of art derives its characteristic force, its pervasive tonality, its vernacular verisimilitude, its unique *logos*, or discourse. Although it is a good thing in itself to attempt to synthesize different national visions into a notion of universality, the literary comparativist should not fall prey to the critical accident of a false universal usurping a real concrete in the process of interpreting individual works. The American Dream, for example, organizes itself in many subtle ways into an understandably native American mythology; and this, in a very basic sense, enters into the American Imagination. In all probability, there is an Indian Dream, too, similarly affecting our own works of art. To translate one national dream-motif into another and both subsequently into a widely generalized pattern of human aspiration offers no clue to the contextual or organic immediacy of the works, whether American or Indian. To decode the sequence and arrangement of the patterns of meaning in Whitman's "Song of Myself" or Emerson's "Hamatreya" into a possible Indian metaphysical system may lead us into an unpardonable critical *faux pas*. The result would be as curious and unfamiliar as one forced by an American interpretation of Aurobindo's *Savitri*, or Tagore's *Urvashi*, or Jai Shankar Prasad's *Kamayani*, say, in terms of Calvinism, Transcendentalism, Pragmatism, or Existentialism. A great work of art is naturally open, and vulnerable to the invasion of the critical *a priori*, and lends itself to a progressive contextual erosion of its primary textual focus. And, although it begins and takes

shape in the specific and singular act of creative immediacy, its mode of continuous existence is such as to permit and even compel its completion in a plurality of dimensions, over which the reader's own consciousness perhaps wields the ultimate sovereignty. It is at this point of semantic completion and realization of the work of art that the Americanness or the Indianness of the reader's critical subjectivity operates. However, before the culminating aesthetic event takes place, before the "objective correlatives" of art are translated back into the "subjective correlatives" of the individual sensibility, the scholar has to patiently master the labyrinthine actualities of an artistic work, which are determined to no less a degree by the facts of a particular culture than the abstractable rhythms of universal feeling and experience.

Whitman's "Chanting the Square Deific" is a case in point. Some Indian scholars have speculated on the possibility of Whitman having been influenced by the cosmology of *Vishnu-Purana*. Others have discovered in the poem some traces of Tantric philosophy. Some have even tortured the thought of Whitman into an agonizing syllogistic embrace with pure Vedantic Advaita. A close examination of the poem's internal landscape—its text and context, its structure and texture, its personal and ontological tensions and equilibriums—tells a story all its own. The reader is made to realize how deeply pervasive, throughout the poem, is its specific, intimate American inwardness. Whitman's catalyzing, constructive intelligence organizes and reconstitutes the elements of vision into an apparently personal, oracular order. Nevertheless, the elements are there; and they are deeply rooted in the American Dream, or conversely, the American Nightmare. The richness of its local content and the sensitivity of its personal response are such that "Chanting the Square Deific" could have been written only by an American poet. And it could have been written by one American poet only, whose peculiar mode of apprehension, power of conceptualization and molecular imagination alone could have accounted for the poem's specific integrality, its concretizing individuality, its expressive idiosyncrasy, and its delicate eschatological balancing of cultural ambivalence and prophetic equivalence. The four sides of the Square projected in the poem cannot have been the Four Yogas—

however much we wish it so—with their quaterennial equilibriums and corresponding intersections as envisaged in the Tantric system. They represent, more transparently, the expansion of the Christian Trinity into a Whitmanesque Square. And this, after all, is the core of the poem's significance. The Fourth Side is the Satanic dimension, and in introducing this fourth dimension Whitman doubles the poet in him into the prophet. Satan is a recognizable American archetype, and the traditional Puritans were perhaps more preoccupied with the Evil One than with God—at least in their secular concerns. Whitman transforms him into a Promethean figure. The recognition of the "power of blackness" on his part joins Whitman to the group of ironic moralists in his day—Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and, possibly, Emily Dickinson. Whitman goes further, when he contrives a synergic symbology in terms of which Satan is accepted as a respected, respectable member of the "First Transcendentalist Club." Another progressive irony enters into the literary situation traced by the poem. For we finally discover that, by conceding the reality of evil as generic, rather than adventitious, to the human condition and to the cosmic order, Whitman comes closer, whether by unconscious creative accident, or by advertised prognostic choice, to Hawthorne's rather than Emerson's Party. Thus the aesthetic individuality of the poem reveals a paradigmatic collective situation. No sensitive critical response to the poem could ignore this originating ambience, which, in terms of the culture, is specific rather than universal.

Or, consider the relativity of the human images as they are projected in national literatures. The American imagination reveals a characteristic central image of man obviously springing from the complex reality of American culture. The self-reliant individual, who tragically initiates and acts out his own destiny, or whose heroic stature is determined by the manner and the stance and style of his struggle against the forces of existence, is a naturalistic image repeated again and again in American literature. In the opening scene of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne invites our attention, through a *schema* of concentrically arranged patterns of human isolation and involvement, all converging on the symbolic letter "A," to the basic contention between the individual personality and the total human condition

as it is governed by social, natural, historical and cosmic order. Hester Prynne, the transcendentalist sinner, Dimmesdale, the secret sinner, Chillingworth, the "unpardonable" sinner and Pearl, the legatee and heiress of a future born out of, and burdened by, all this sinful past, comprise the first circle. The townsfolk and the community with its church, prison, and scaffold represent the second circle. The mysterious wilderness, with its inscrutable powers at once tempting and menacing, is the third circle. The enveloping vault of the heavens, full of signs, emblems and revelations, traces yet another circle. The letter "A," filling the space between heaven and earth and the distance between the settled community and the uninhabited frontier, intersects all these circles. And yet it is firmly attached to the centre that falls within the region of a human heart. Hawthorne sets all his scenic ingredients in a field of cultural and historical relativities sharply contrasted in themselves and projected through the corresponding polarities of the human personality as well. The human and natural planes are enisled into a single, interlocking landscape. In the result, the whole scene synoptically reflects the totality of the New England cultural presence as viewed by a perceptive nineteenth-century writer in whose vision spiritual anguish and moral irony are held in balance.

We come across apparently similar scenes in classical Indian literature, highlighting personal displacement, social dis-possession, and cultural complicity. Shakuntala being compelled to authenticate her wifely credentials in the court of Dushyanta, her own husband by *Gandharva-Vivaha*, comes to one's mind. Also, Sita confronting her lord Rama when he summons her to yet another impossible ordeal of impersonal justice in *Rama-Rajya* itself. It is conceivable that these too reiterate an archetypal human situation common to all cultures. Yet, the projected images of human individuality in rebellion against circumstance are unmistakably coloured by the values and assumptions of Indian culture.

To take another instance : the final scene in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Gatsby swims against the current, exerting the climactic energy of his all too human will against the primitive, pre-conscious, amoral vitalities of the universe. In the very

vibrations of the hero's selfhood seems to lie the powerful actuality of the American Dream of self-reliant, self-consummating individualism. A significant contrast to Gatsby's Platonic self-estimation is the Ellora presentation of Ravana shaking Kailas—which is an inverted but complementary version of Shiva the Cosmic Dancer, a motif popular with the classical Indian artists. Ravana is not a Gatsby type of rebel with a daemonic selfhood chained to the centre of his being. He is much rather the destructive Demon acting creatively in consonance with the divine powers, or acting on his own in order to bring the latter back into the natural order. He collaborates with his antagonist, Shiva, with whom he shares, without the interventions of history or personality, the life-giving ardour of destructive power (Shiva himself, incidentally, is the Destroyer among the Indian Trinity). In the Dance of Shiva, similarly, Shiva collaborates with the Dwarf-Demon (*Tamasa*) whom the Divine Destroyer slays in order to renew and reanimate a moribund universe. The rebel, the rebellion, and the target of rebellion are all simultaneously involved in the same rhythm. There is no distance, no separation, no alienation, no swimming of a hostile flood chafing against the shores of personality.

*Nagananda*, a Sanskrit play, offers another instance. The protagonist attains "heroic knowledge" through his contemplative self-sacrifice, which implies the elimination of individuation, the loss of the grosser self. The subversive processes of the human consciousness are cancelled whereby man transcends the cyclic mirrorings of desire and pain caused by an assertive will. One is inclined to believe, from the evidence of literary works, that the American image of man is determined by active tragic self-transcendence, whereas the corresponding Indian image is controlled by the passive dynamic of self-sublimation into a cosmic consciousness.

Often we come across certain verbal and imagistic resonances in American and Indian literatures, which again illustrate the concrete manner in which the differing cultural assumptions of value enter into imaginative expression. Emily Dickinson's poem, "A Clock Stopped," demonstrates the dualisms of Time and Self, Man and Nature, History and Consciousness, Mortality and Divinity. So profusely hyphenated is the punctuation of the poem that

even the visual impression it makes on the page reflects the tortuous, scalding introspection, the struggle and tension on the part of the poet in arriving at a statement of her poetic intuitions and perceptions as they surge and swing over the arcs of time. The poet's "amazing sense" of life insinuates itself into the imagery of time as her vision fluctuates from a time-locked actuality to a "degreeless noon" of eternal reality. The giant clock-work mechanism of the Universe, with its impenetrable mysteries and inscrutable revelations, with its quivering decimal fluctuations and its hurried processions of integer essences, is evocatively projected by the contrapuntal image of "Pendulum of Snow." Time flows, as ice melts, from the concrete to the liquid through the vaporous, and then back to the solid state. Its circular transformation and its cyclical fluency of states trace out the nature of human reality as well as human selfhood. The laws of nature and the laws of human personality are interlaced with each other. The processes of change and growth, destruction and renewal are intricately interconnected. The notion of continuity, however, is indicated in the poem by the visualization of an intermitted movement of moments. The poetic image is a superbly ironic one. And irony is the necessary controlling attitude by which alone Emily Dickinson can juxtapose the contradictions of fulfilment and despair, the immediate ecstasy and the distanced agony. The oppositions in her world-view, in their momentary collaboration through irony, and in the vacant interludes of a consciousness suspended in prophecy, measure out equally her selfhood. In her strategic use of irony, to indicate a feeling, a perception, an illumination, or a "route of evanescence," Emily Dickinson proves herself to be one with Hawthorne, Melville, Mark Twain, Henry Adams, and Henry James.

Contrasting with the ironic mode of conceptualizing the relationship between Time and Eternity, as reflected in American writing, is the vision of perpetual correspondence, of permanent equilibrium, which is revealed in classical Indian literature. The very first stanza of Kalidasa's *Kumara-Sambhavam* invokes the majestic presence of Himalaya:

*Astyuttarasyam disi devatatma himalayo nama nagadhirajah;  
Purvaparastoyanidhi vagahya sthitah prithviya-iva manadandah.*

(In the northern quarter is divine Himalaya,  
 the lord of the mountains;  
 Reaching from Eastern to Western Oceans,  
 firm as a rod to measure the earth).

The Indian poet assumes a certain ontological status for man, which is ingrained in his culture, and which unifies the disparate strands of reality in terms of an order based on equivalence and permanence. The very first word, *asthi*, establishes the mood of assurance. Then follows the orientation of that assured essence towards human knowledge and recognition symbolized by the sense of direction (*Uttarasyam*, *Purvaparah*, etc.). And then follows an extension of this recognition into consciousness as indicated by the dimensions, attributes, and the status of reality (*Devatatma*, *Himalayonama Nagadhirajah*, etc.). And finally, the solid presence of snow-clad Himavant is extended into the abstract spheres of time and space. The line against the sky pencilled by the sea-shouldering (*toyanidhih*), land-measuring (*prithivyaiva manadandah*) immensity of the mountain ranges recedes into its pre-mythopoeic state of abstract power. Himavant as the Mana-Danda symbolizes the permanence beneath and beyond change. The snow which garments Himavant's *asthitva* is no mere "mountain interval," or a pendulum of seasonal changeability, or an artifact of temporal variation. It is the appropriate assignation of permanence, of continuity, of the perpetual ascendancy of time into Eternity. The Pendulum fluctuates and thereby measures the passage of time; the Scale measures existence by standing still. One is an image of Becoming, the other of Being. Kalidasa's Himavant has a magnificence which is circumambient, instantaneous, comprehensive, unlike Emily Dickinson's Sun (in another of her poems) whose radiance rises "a ribbon a time." The contrastive treatment of the descriptive imagery of "Snow" in the American and Indian poems exemplifies how radically different the cultural assumptions of Nature are, and how truthfully each literary image transcribes the distinctive autonomy of its cultural motivation. These differences and *differentiae* must be properly respected and appreciated, for they determine the "mode of being" of works of art.

An intimate knowledge of American literary history—its struggle for critical recognition and academic respectability and its final emergence both as a contemporary discipline and also as a significant dimension of the wider culture—is likely to prove fruitful in our own efforts in India. For we have not in any real sense accomplished the historical reconstruction of our literary tradition. The appropriate frames of reference, the patterns of critical discourse, the historical sequences, the ideo-dynamic progressions—everything, in short—have to be identified and described. At least in regard to the study of Indian writing in English (or Indo-Anglian Literature) the achievements of the literary historians in America can offer many guide-lines.

The beginnings of a national literature, or a new literature differentiated from the traditional, are always accompanied by critical condescension towards authors and their works. It was so in America in the past; and it is so in India now. What is an Indian book?—we ask, in our elegant sophistication as internationalists in literature. Why should we waste our time reading Indian books, when there are so many good books in English, or in English translation, within our reach?—we have cogitated. A student of American literature would at once recall that these were approximately the same moods through which American writers, their readers and critics, had to pass before the unconscious plenitude of the creative life could find its crystallization into a recognizable literary tradition. This came about during the so-called “American Renaissance” in the nineteenth century, when the fidgety proto-nationalism of Irving, Bryant, and Cooper was replaced by the vigorous literary radicalism of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman and modified by the artistic excellence of Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and Emily Dickinson.

Our recognition of Indian writing in English as a tributary to the national stream of literary culture has been hampered by mental reservations, predispositions, and timidities caused mostly by our paternalistic critical orientation under the British. We have developed, perhaps on our own, an automatic hostility and an uninformed aversion towards our own literatures. This has led to a disastrous separation of the new literatures, particularly



Indo-Anglian, from the vital vernacular tradition. Viewed as something apart from the historical continuity of the national tradition, Indian writing in English has appeared to be an "untouchable" or half-breed literature. However, our increasing attention to, and experience of non-British literatures, particularly American, has produced the salutary "shock of recognition," following which at least the younger generation of Indian scholars, it is hoped, would discover a national tradition on modern historical principles. The search for literary identity has meant in the American context, as it would in ours, an investigation into literary and historical concepts, topologies, sequences, configurations, and other controlling thematic and evolutionary strategies, so as to delineate the continuity, and the past and prospective possibilities of the literary sub-culture. The historical-cultural approach had spent its force with the advent of New Criticism—with its insistence on the textual self-sufficiency of artistic works. The quest for a "usable past" has yielded place to the quest for a usable text. And, consequently, American criticism stands sharply polarized between a literary identity which is intrinsic and another which is organic.

It is not altogether inevitable that a similar polarization obtrude or devitalize the Indian sensibility. In analyzing works of art, in determining the patterns of historical sequence and progression, the historians of Indo-Anglian literature will have to raise the same questions, face the same situations, and evolve the same—or similar—strategies as the historians of American literature. What is the "usable past" in the Indian context? What are the basic attitudes and reactions of our writers to the "past"—if we have suffered a loss of the past? Do they evade the past, or seek to modify or restore it? Is there at all a unified concept of the Indian past, so polycentric and attenuated our historical sense as it has been? Has not the experience of modernity brought about the inevitable refractions, inversions, and transformations in our consciousness of tradition? Can our understanding of such works as *The Serpent and the Rope*, *The Untouchable*, *The Guide*, *The Continent of Circe* be significantly enhanced by the use of a governing metaphor like the "usable past"? Can we employ a possible notion of the "Indian Spirit" as a cliomorphic variant of the "Frontier Spirit"

or the "American Dream"?

Literary historians in America have used thematic or projective categories such as isolation and alienation, innocence and experience, the American Adam, the Power of Blackness, etc., in tracing the complex continuity of their literary tradition. Indian writers, as evidenced by their fictional characters and situations, have reflected a comparable passage of the collective psyche through the optative or obsessive phases of cultural experience. Can we speak of an expatriate imagination in Indian writing? Or of the "Adamic" theme relative to our modern classics? Can we start with "little histories" at the thematic level, and then work towards a wider and more compact and well-integrated definitive history of our literature?

The American scholars have also employed the varying dimensions of the national experience and the corresponding cycles of the creative process in order to project the growth of American literature. Can this serve as a model for the historical description of Indian literature during, say, the last two hundred years? Is it possible to phase our literary evolution in terms of the Colonial Experience, Enlightenment, Nationalism, Transcendentalism, Realism, Naturalism, Radicalism, Expatriation, Symbolism, and Neo-Romanticism as constituting the major periodicities of our literature? Can we delineate a historically convincing line of continuous literary emergence from Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Michael Madhusudan Datt, Bharatendu Harischandra, and Toru Dutt to the Transcendentalism of Tagore, Bharati, and Aurobindo, to the Realism of Gurajada Appa Row and Premchand, to the Naturalism of Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, and Gopichand, to the Radicalism of Agyeya, Yeshpal, and Sri Sri, to the Symbolism of Sumitranandan Pant, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, and Jainendra Kumar, and, finally, to the Disenchantment of Nirad Chaudhury, Arudra, and the Indian Beats? The literary situation in India has its own intricate contours, its peculiar eminences and depressions, slopes and plateaus. And a historical framework seeking to define its evolution accordingly calls for a complex and pluralistic approach. The American example can be of great help in this direction.

No less instructive to us is the American literary historian's projection of certain unique constellations, configurations,

and polarities of the creative temper as it intersects specific time-scales, reflecting the broader co-ordinates of the American mind and character. From an ideodynamic viewpoint, within the framework of literary history, the writers of the New England Renaissance seem to project a common collective pattern of moral, metaphysical, or intellectual experience. In their works, the problem of the human self figures as an imaginative focus upon which their diverse conceptions of the universe and of human destiny converge as well as their variant individual temperaments. Emerson's philosophical monism is organically expanded into Whitman's mystic pluralism. Thoreau's practical transcendentalism is counterpointed by Poe's ratiocinative empiricism. Melville's metaphysical ambivalence is contrasted with, and complemented by Hawthorne's moral empiricism. If Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman represent a dimension of hopeful affirmation of the "inner-directed" self, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and Emily Dickinson reflect the countervailing voice of ironic despair exposing the inadequacies of the alienated self. At times, the coalition of opposite geniuses appears to be more pronouncedly authentic than the collaboration of sympathetic temperaments. Whitman, in his inclusive vision of evil as an organic element in human experience, is closer to Hawthorne than to Emerson. Melville, in his intimations of the symbolic structuring of the universe, reveals a deeper affinity to Emerson than to Hawthorne. In his preference of depth over "breadth" in life's rich spiritual economy, Thoreau's soul selects its own society as much as Dickinson's. And in their zeal for discovering a unified cosmic order, Poe and Emerson reveal a not too dissimilar intellect.

The American writers of the transition period between the two major flowerings of national literature constitute another interesting subcultural configuration. Their work is oriented in common to the contemporary intellectual preoccupation with the nature of "reality." Howells, in his acceptance of the middle-class, small-town average as the essential source of reality, and Henry James, in his emphasis on the introspective eye of the sensitive artist as the springhead of real "reality," stand in direct opposition to each other. Mark Twain, in his rejection of conscience as an untenable illusion, and Henry Adams, in *his* rejection of both the "insect sight" and the "mimetic insight" of the historically

displaced human self, stand in significant mutual contrast. Howells and James affirm the human reality as the determining force of man's heroic or tragic worth. Mark Twain and Adams, on the other hand, are deep dyed naturalists frustrated by the spectacle of man's unreasonable suffering and pretence, of human decadence and universal decay. Tilt the angle of vision in another direction, and one discovers that Adams and James are closer in their moral affinity, by virtue of their insistence on intellectual refinement, or spiritual grace and conversion, as a necessary condition for man's transcendence over the confining limitations of reality. On the other hand, Howells and Mark Twain, in their repudiation of social or ethical extremes, virtually emphasize the same common concern for the empirical substantives and secular simplicities of life.

The writers of the twentieth-century Renaissance offer yet another historical cycle of the collective literary *ethos*. T. S. Eliot, in his reversion to the classical tradition and culture, and Ezra Pound, in his substitution of classical knowledge for historical experience, bring out in their axiological confrontation a similarity within the polarity. Frost and Robinson, the vision of both suspended in ironic tentativeness, are highly differentiated in the immediacy of their individual imagination. Hemingway's conception of human valour and fortitude and endurance is the imaginative equivalent of Faulkner's faith in ultimate human prevalence; and yet the arabesque simplicity of Hemingway and the baroque complexity of Faulkner drive them as aesthetic strategists towards opposite poles.

The configurations discussed above, when further considered in an emergent context of historical continuity, illustrate the filiations and connections between Hawthorne, Henry James, and Faulkner, between Poe, Wolfe, and O'Neill, between Melville, Mark Twain, and Hemingway, between Whitman, Frost, and T. S. Eliot, and so on. The American literary historians, particularly Robert E. Spiller, Howard Mumford Jones, Oscar Cargill, Leon Howard, Harry Levin, and R.W.B. Lewis, have profitably exploited these iterative situations in American literature not only in projecting a meaningful historical tradition, but also in illustrating the intimate reciprocity between literature and civilization. In doing so, they have successfully avoided the critical un-

reality of philological research as well as the critical anachronism of New Criticism.

There is no question, on the part of the Indian scholars, of a hasty, uncritical application of analogous postulates and theories of cycles and configurations to the mapping out of Indian, or Indo-Anglian literary history. But, sooner or later, we too will be confronted with the necessity of having to formulate a *locus apparatus* for our historiographical task. The sequence of literary events; the sequence of literary personalities; the sequence of literary forces; the sequence of aesthetic topologies—all these must be properly ascertained and blueprinted before we can transform our casual, amorphous interest in a vital native literature into a controlled, meaningful consciousness of historical continuity.

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## II

### THE LANDSCAPE OF AUTHORS

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## EDWARD TAYLOR: A NOTE ON THE AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION

M. G. KRISHNAMURTHI

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### I

MR. SIDNEY LIND begins his essay "Edward Taylor—A Revaluation" on a curious note. He holds that Taylor has been given "in a quantitative sense at least, as much consideration as though he were a poet of high merit. Yet he is at his best a mediocre poet, as he was doomed to be, whatever his inherent poetic gifts by reason of his station in life."<sup>1</sup> What one objects to is not Mr. Lind's view that Taylor is not a great poet, in the sense he is not a Shakespeare or a Donne, but the view that he was doomed to be a mediocre poet "by reason of his station in life." Taylor, like many other American poets, shows a remarkable ability to overcome the so-called limitations of his station. He is an authentic poet, and, as Austin Warren has argued, he "invokes as companions in one respect or another—Crashaw, Blake, Dickinson, Hopkins, Crane—all greater, and superior in the frequency of their successes. He is at worst a poet and not a metrical proseman."<sup>2</sup>

If Taylor is "at worst a poet and not a metrical proseman," the literary critic has to concern himself with two problems:

<sup>1</sup> Sidney E. Lind, "Edward Taylor—A Revaluation," *New England Quarterly*, XXI (1948), p. 519.

<sup>2</sup> Austin Warren, "Edward Taylor's Poetry: Colonial Baroque," *Kenyon Review*, III (1941), 371.



- (1) Taylor's relationship with a particular literary tradition, and  
 (2) the qualities which make him a poet. Also, a discussion of Taylor's poems in their relationship with the tradition of metaphysical poetry will focus a reader's attention on the emergence of the American literary tradition. Mr. Warren, however, prefers the word "baroque" to "metaphysical" since in his view "baroque" can be used to describe

such English poetry and prose antedating (at least in its momentum) the neo-Classical movement as would, by neo-Classical standards, be considered to exemplify, 'false wit.' [He further argues that] it subsumes the prose of Andrews, Benlowles, Cleveland, Crashaw and Donne. Its philosophy is Christian and supernaturalist and incarnational, admits of miracle and transcensions of common sense, hence of surprise. Therefore its aesthetic endorses bold figures, verbal and imaginal, pun, oxymoron, paradox, the metaphor which links events from seemingly alien, discontinuous spheres. It likes audacious mixtures, the colloquial and the erudite. If it provides ecstasies, it allows also of ingenuities : anagrams and acrostics and poems shaped like obelisks or Easter wings.<sup>3</sup>

While Warren's description of Baroque art is useful in a discussion of European art (including poetry), probably the term "metaphysical" is more useful in a discussion of Taylor's poetry since "metaphysical" focusses attention on the relationship of Taylor's poetry with a particular literary tradition in his own language. When Dr. Johnson gave critical respectability to the term "metaphysical poetry", he was using it to denote a poetry which was different in kind from Augustan poetry. Further, in view of the attempts of T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis and Cleanth Brooks to show that what struck Johnson as qualities peculiar to the "metaphysical" poets are qualities characteristic of much that is good in English poetry, the term "metaphysical poetry" helps one see Taylor in relation to certain aspects of the tradition of poetry in English. The differences between his poems and those of the metaphysical poets help dramatize the emer-

gence of the American literary tradition in the seventeenth century.

For the purposes of this paper the basic assumption behind much that is good in metaphysical poetry seems to be closer to Coleridge's comment that poetry "brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity"<sup>4</sup> than to the assumptions behind the neo-Classical concept of "decorum" and the "romantic" concept of "high seriousness." As a consequence, the creative process is not selective, i.e., image, idiom and tone are not determined by the form the poet chooses. It is also assumed that there is no proper way of responding and imagery and tone are determined by the poet's "inclusive" sensibility. And if this is a fairly accurate description of the mode of the metaphysical poets, Edward Taylor invites comparison with them, and the differences between his poems and those of the metaphysical poets indicate that however close New England culture was to that of Old England, the evolution of a distinctively American culture had begun as early as the seventeenth century.

II

A few historical facts will, perhaps, make the view that Edward Taylor was quite close to the metaphysical poets as well as a general movement of thought less fanciful. Taylor did not leave England till 1688, was twenty-five when he left, and was already highly educated. Richard Baxter's book *The Saints Everlasting Rest* was published in London in 1650 and though Taylor's library does not contain this book, it contains two treatises of Baxter. Further, Taylor's library has not survived in its entirety and so the possibility of Taylor's acquaintance with *The Saints Everlasting Rest* cannot be ruled out. The question of the role of the senses in the apprehension of higher things was receiving serious consideration at the time. Baxter, like many others of the period, held that

<sup>4</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, II (London, 1958), p. 12.

God would not have given us either our senses themselves, or the usual objects, if they might not have been serviceable to his own praise, and helps to raise us to the apprehension of higher things. . . . He that will speak in man's language, and speak that which he is capable to conceive. . . . Bring down thy conceivings to the reach of sense, excellency without familiarity, doth more amaze than delight us : Both Love and Joy are promoted by familiar acquaintance.<sup>5</sup>

Bringing down the "conceivings to the reach of sense" is precisely what the metaphysicals were trying to do, and the characteristic movement of Taylor's poems indicates his closeness to the metaphysicals. This can be illustrated by looking closely at a few selected passages. "Meditation I," the very first poem in Taylor's "Preparatory Meditations," can be taken as illustrative of the problems that he as a religious poet had to face. He has to communicate a sense of the Infinite which is, by its very definition, beyond the finite. So the need to use paradox and images which denote opposed objects or states of mind is related to the nature of the experience and of the medium through which the poet has to communicate his experience. The images have to refer to something the reader can respond to and at the same time they must take the reader beyond them. The use of paradox and mutually opposed images must lead to a perception of a unity of which the opposing images are parts. "Meditation I" is a good example of successful communication of the "beyond" through images taken from the "here and now."

What Love is this of thine, that cannot be  
In thine Infinity, O Lord, Confinde,

Unless it in thy very Person see,  
Infinity, and Finitie Conjoyn'd?  
What hath thy Godhead, as not Satisfide  
Marri'de our Manhood, making it Bride?

Oh! Matchless Love! Filling Heaven to the brim!  
O're running it: all running o're beside

<sup>5</sup> Donald E. Stanford, (ed.) *The Poems of Edward Taylor* (New Haven, 1960), p. xxviii.

This World! Nay overflowing Hell; wherein  
For thine Elect, there rose a mighty Tide!  
To quench those flames, that else on us feed,

Oh! that thy Love might overflow my Heart!  
To fire the same with Love: for Love I would.  
But oh! my streight'ned Breast! My Lifeless Sparke!  
My Fireless Flame! What Chilly Love, and Cold!  
In measure small! In Manner Chilly! See.  
Lord blow the Coal: Thy Love Enflame in mee.<sup>6</sup>

This relatively short poem illustrates the nature of the problem and the way in which Taylor tries to solve it. One notes first the personalizing pronoun "thine" in the first line placed between an abstract word "Love" made more abstract by using the capital "L" and the negative "cannot bee." In the next line the pronoun is followed by "Infinity", and the last word "confinde" throws light on the "Love." This is followed by the orthodox Christian idea that the finite and the infinite meet in the person of Christ. The effect the lines "Unless it in thy very person see, infinity and Finitie Conjoyn'd?" leave on the reader is not that of a specific pictorial image, and rightly so. Infinity cannot be conceived of in terms of a finite image, and hence images have to be used in a way that the habitual way of looking at things and of conceiving are destroyed. Hence also the image the poem is cannot be found in any single image or group of images, but in the totality of the impression the poem leaves on the reader.

Then one notes that the paradox in the question "What hath thy Godhead, as not Satisfide/Marri'de" is in keeping with the general movement of the poem. Then one also notes the startling juxtaposition of "Manhood" with "Bride."

The image of God as the bridegroom and that of the elect as the bride are basic to the development of the next stanza since God's love is presented as active in that stanza. The idea that God's love is unlimited was already suggested by the first two lines of the poem. The implications are drawn out by the lines

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Oh! Matchless Love! Filling Heaven to the brim!<sup>7</sup>  
 O're running it: all running o're beside  
 This world! Ney overflowing Hell; wherein?  
 For thine Elect, there rose a mighty Tide!<sup>7</sup>

With remarkable ease these lines refer us to the Flood. "The mighty tide" is a manifestation of God's grace. Again we note the orthodox Christian doctrine that Christ, the son of Man, expiated the sins of Adam and Eve.

But the poem does not stop with this; if the flames in the second stanza are the flames of hell, the fire in the third and last stanza is the fire of love and zeal. But before the image of the fire of God's love can be introduced, the previous image of the "mighty tide" has to be incorporated into the new image. For, God's love has to make man strive towards Him. Hence the stanza begins with "Oh! that thy Love might overflow my Heart! ! To fire the same with Love: for Love I would." The word "overflow" refers us back to the "tide" and the image of the "tide" and that of "fire" in the new context contradict each other: so do many other images in the poem. So the contradictions on the representational level seem to be more a deliberate device than a sign of ineptitude. The poem assigns a strictly functional purpose to the images and by bringing together disparate images the poem communicates a perception which images on their representational level cannot communicate. Hence we note that God's love which overflows the heart of the poet fires "the same with Love." The very juxtaposition of this fire with the flames of hell establishes a distinction between them. While the flames of hell were symbols of punishment and of man's separation from God at the same time, the fire of God's love is a proof and a symbol of the elect's reconciliation with God through the agency of Christ.

But the reconciliation cannot be effected through man's will alone. Will has to be assisted by God's grace and this concept is the theoretical basis of the last stanza. Images arousing diverse and opposed impressions were used earlier in the poem, but the last stanza brings together such images—"Lifeless

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

spärke", "Fireless Flame", "Chilly Love." The adjectives and the nouns they qualify leave opposing impressions and thus communicate the nature of a striving towards God without the assistance of grace. Such a striving is a "Fireless Flame" in the sense that it is a hopeless zeal. The precise significance of these images is brought out by the last line—"Lord blow the coal : Thy Love enflame in mee." The image of the "coal" clarifies the earlier image of the "Fireless Flame." Coal, the potential flame, needs blowing if it has to burst into flame. That blowing, the poem seems to say, is the operation of God's grace.

It is obvious that in poetry of this kind where matter and manner cannot be separated, imagery and tone are of supreme importance. "Meditation I" is fairly representative of imagery in Taylor's poetry. But it does not indicate the role played by tone in his poetry. The tonal range of Taylor's poetry can be illustrated by an analysis of a few passages from "God's Determinations."

"God's Determinations" draws our attention to the closeness of Taylor's verse to the dramatic verse of 17th century England. The following selection from the dialogue between Satan and the Soul illustrates the functional nature of variations in tone.

SATAN : Soon ripe, soon rot. Young Saint, Old Divill. Loe  
Why to an Empty Whistle did you goe?  
What come Uncalled? and Run unsent for? Stay  
Its Childrens Bread: Hands off: out Dogs, away.

SOUL : It's not an Empty Whistle : yet withall,  
And if it be a Whistle, then a call:  
A Call to Childrens Bread, which take we may.  
Thou art the Dog whipt hence away.<sup>8</sup>

The clipped words of Satan provide a character sketch. Then one notes the characteristically metaphysical bringing together of words with opposed connotations—"ripe", "rot", "Saint" and "Divill". The bringing together of these words is a means employed to abolish distinctions which give hope to the Soul. One

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407.

also notes the functional use of the word "Empty Whistle"—a bringing together of a general and a particular word, leading inevitably to "What come uncall'd?" and "run unsent for?". Satan is trying to convince the Soul that the coming and the running are meaningless. He does not deny the existence of the "Bread", but argues that since it is children's bread, the Soul cannot partake of it. The contemptuous comment "Hands off: out Dogs, away" communicates the attitude Satan adopts towards the Soul.

Soul's answer begins with the absolute assertion—"It's not an Empty Whistle." Hope rests on this absolute assertion. What is significant is the deftness with which Taylor employs the same image to serve different purposes. "Whistle" in Satan's speech symbolizes an absence, and "bread" symbolizes something which exists, but is a source of despair and a means of drawing the soul's attention to its unworthiness. In the Soul's speech, however, the whistle is a call and the bread is something "which take we may." The image of the "Dog" in Satan's speech throws light on an attitude, but in the Soul's speech it is something more than a taunting reference to Satan's expulsion from heaven. It refers to the relationship between Satan and God and testifies to the faith of the Soul that Satan, in relation to God, is nothing more than a "Dog whipt hence away." As is usual with images in Taylor, the image of the "Dog" takes us back to a passage which precedes the one I have quoted.

Now Satan counts the Cast his own thus thrown:

Off goes the Angels Coate, on goes his own.

With Gripping Paws, and Goggling Eyes draws nigher

Like some fierce Shagg'd Red Lion, belching fire;<sup>9</sup>

The contrast between the "Red Lion belching fire" and that of the "dog whipt hence away" successfully communicates without any overt statement the soul's realization that Satan, in God's scheme, is not what the image of the lion signifies. Even as a structural device the change in imagery is significant. The

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

image of a red lion is a simile and that of the dog is a metaphor. If one can assume that a metaphor establishes a greater degree of similarity between different objects, the change indicates a coming closer to truth. It is such deft use of imagery that makes one wonder if Taylor is really the "unselfconscious poet"<sup>10</sup> Warren makes him out to be.

The tonal range and the functional nature of the changes in tone can be illustrated with the help of two more passages. These, like the ones I have quoted so far, are from "God's Determinations" and they are all similar in their mode; but there is a difference in tone. The following from "The Accusation of the Inward Man" is a good example:

You want clear Spectacles: Your eyes are dim:  
Turn inside out: and turn your Eyes within.  
Your sins like motes in th'sun do swim: nay see  
Your Mites are Molehills, Molehills Mountains bee.  
Your Mountain Sins do magnitude transcend:  
Whose number's numberless, and do want end.  
The Understandings dark, and therefore Will  
Account Ill for Good, and Good for ill.  
As to a Purblind man men oft appeare  
Like Walking Trees within the Hemisphere.  
So in the judgement Carnall things Excell:  
Pleasures and Profits beare away the Bell.  
The Will is hereupon perverted so,  
It laqueys after ill, doth good foregoe.  
The Reasonable Soule doth much delight  
A Pickpack t'ride o'th' Sensuall Appetite.<sup>11</sup>

The tone of this passage is closer to the poems of meditation than to that of the dialogue between Satan and Soul. The passage begins with a pun on the word "spectacles." Spectacles as aids to sight refer to a new mode of perception and this level of meaning is indicated by the words "your eyes are dim." But "clear Spectacles" also refer to the objects of con-

<sup>10</sup> Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

<sup>11</sup> *Poems*, *op. cit.*, p. 409.




templation and so lead to the words "turn your Eyes within." The pun thus communicates the perception that man needs a mode of perception other than the habitual one and that he needs new objects of contemplation.

One also notes the close connection the language of this passage, like most of the passages in Taylor, has with colloquial idiom—"it laqueys after ill," "A Pickpack t'ride o'th' Sensuall Appetite." The characteristic bringing together of an abstract concept and a concrete image establishes Taylor's kinship with the 17th century metaphysical poets.

When one turns to "Christ's Reply," one notes a change in tone once again.

Peace, Peace, my Hony, do not Cry,  
My little Darling, wipe thine eye,  
Oh Cheer, Cheer up, come see.  
Is anything too deare my Dove,  
Is anything too good, my Love,  
To get or give for thee?

If in the severall thou art  
This Yelper fierce will at thee bark:  
That thou art mine this shows.   
As Spot barks back the sheep again  
Before they to the Pound are ta'ne,  
So he and hence 'way goes.

But yet this Cur that bayghs so sore  
Is broken tootht, and muzzled sure,  
Fear not, my Pritty Heart.  
His barking is to make thee Cling  
Close underneath thy Saviours Wing.  
Why did my sweeten start? <sup>12</sup>

The functional nature of the change in tone is grasped as soon as we contrast this passage with the other passages quoted earlier. The dialogue between Satan and the Soul is essen-

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 414-415.

tully a dialogue between equals. The Soul, in argument, shows itself able to stand up to Satan and there is a change in tone towards the end of the dialogue. A tone of contempt having failed, Satan adopts a reasonable tone :

Come, come with mee I'll shew your Outs and Inns,  
Your Inside, and your out: Your Holy things.  
For these I will anatomize then see,  
Believe your very Eyes, believe not mee.<sup>13</sup>

Significantly the tone of the passage that follows the dialogue between Satan and the Soul, "The Accusation of the Inward Man," is eminently reasonable. The tone of "Christ's Reply" is that of a mother talking to a frightened child. The passage is lyrical in spite of the homely images, and the imagery is simpler and this very simplicity is functional. The subtlety and the sophistication of the dialogue, and the sublimity of the "accusation" give place to a simplicity. The linguistic complexity of the earlier sections is intimately connected with the nature of the experience they communicate. While the earlier sections communicate an experience of struggle, "Christ's Reply", in contrast, is a consolation, a promise and a clarification of aspects of experience which baffled the soul earlier. Hence the tone is no longer the one equals adopt in talking with each other. The tone of the dialogue seems to be conditioned by the belief that it is man who has to struggle against Satan and can only expect help; hence the tone is argumentative. The tonal difference between the earlier sections and "Christ's Reply" communicate a particular conception of man's position with regard to Satan and God.

Though "Christ's Reply" is lyrical, the characteristic mode is operative. It is a kind of lyric where intellection and the lyric impulse are not antithetical. Satan is now a "Yelper," and the changes in the imagery connected with Satan are indicative of the changes in Satan's role at different stages in the Soul's spiritual development. With a twist that is characteristically metaphysical, the very harassment the Soul suffered at the hands of

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

Satan's made a proof of the fact that man belongs to God.

Satan, so far as the poem is concerned, functions in more or less the same way the image of the compass functions in Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Imagery and tone, and not abstract concepts, are central to Taylor's poetry. So even though the ideas in Taylor's poems, when they are abstracted from the poetic structure, are nothing new, the impression the poems leave on a reader is not that of versified dogma, but that of religious poetry. The theology is the framework, and the poems draw the reader's attention to an individual perception of the doctrine; the doctrine is the object to which the poet is responding.

The question now is: "Can these similarities between Taylor's poems and the poems of the British metaphysical poets be accounted for only in terms of literary influences?" If one remembers that American literature was to develop, especially during the nineteenth century, on lines different from that of British literature, it is quite likely that cultural differences had much to do with Taylor's "choice" of imagery. One notes, for instance, in Taylor's poems a greater degree of "abstraction" than in the poems of the British metaphysicals. Unlike seventeenth-century America, seventeenth-century England was a graded society. In spite of the close relationship between class culture and mass culture the classes and the masses in England were distinguished from each other by manners and idiom. So a poet could base his poetic idiom on the spoken idiom of the educated classes. But Taylor, living in a frontier town, could not be as selective as George Herbert, who influenced him, could be. The differences between George Herbert's "Redemption" and the poems of Taylor quoted in this paper throw some light on this point:

Having been tenant long to a rich Lord  
Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,  
And make a suit unto him, to afford  
A new small-rented lease, and cancell th' old.

In heaven at his manor I him sought:  
They told me there, that he was lately gone

Edward Taylor

About some land, which he had dearly bought  
Long since on earth, to take possession.

I straight return'd, and knowing his great birth,  
Sought him accordingly in great resorts;  
In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts:  
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth

Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied,  
Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, & died.<sup>14</sup>

The careful elaboration of the images of "tenant", "rich Lord" and "lease" is characteristically metaphysical. But what is significant is the fact that Herbert could utilize a particular relationship that existed in his society for his own purposes. The advantages that such a social system gave him are made clear in the last six lines of the poem. The words "great birth" lead inevitably to "great resorts," "cities," "theatres," "gardens," "parks," and "courts." The assumption that he can find his Lord in one of those resorts establishes the difference between the Lord and the tenant and heightens the effect of the last three lines of the poem. Edward Taylor could not utilize social gradations as a means of indicating other kinds of gradations. He had to rely on what was available to him, and use the imagery derived from law courts, the brewery and personal relationships. His, it seems to me, was a harder struggle than George Herbert's, and he is the first of the many American writers whose conscious or unconscious recognition of the differences between the "Old World" and the "New World" accounts for the "Americanness of American literature."

<sup>14</sup> H. J. C. Grierson, and G. Bullough, (eds.) *The Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse* (London, 1934), p. 361.

18 labor, and do not they kneeling, before  
 the seventh, forsooth. They as being. Nap-  
 pyne who can listen this same top-  
 tumber run, which illumines all a ca-  
 dence, as well when they rest as when they  
 toil, not without a feeling of grati-  
 tude. For life is a blameless, how  
 blameless soever it be, on this earth  
 Monday as on his Sunday.

Thus much at least a man  
 may do; he may not improve on  
 his fellows, perhaps not upon  
 himself. Thus much at a man  
 do; confidently & steadily we go  
 to his thought, for its error, if there  
 be any, will soonest appear in  
 practice; and if there be none, he  
 is a section so much as actual pro-  
 gress in the way of living.

Do you not believe in a god? (The)  
 pro. Next day he call him? When the Rev. Dr.  
 Wolff asked the Prelimin. Sheeran "Oh, how many  
 gods do you believe?" Sheeran replied "There is one  
 God; but he has many names. The whole earth  
 stands upon the serpent Sheshna; she has 1000 teeth  
 and 2000 tongues; with every tongue she pronounces every  
 day a new name of God; and thus she has done for cen-  
 turies on centuries, never repeating a name once pronounced."  
 I do like Sheshna.  
 At this point the Rev. Dr. Wolff came up to the front  
 but was not heard.

# THOREAU'S LITERARY ART AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

K. R. CHANDRASEKHARAN

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## I

"AN HONEST BOOK," said Thoreau, modifying the well-known definition of an honest man, "is the noblest work of man." He would have whole-heartedly agreed with Milton's definition of a good work as "the precious life-blood of a master spirit" and with Ruskin's classification of books into two categories. His life, as Emerson points out in his biographical sketch, was full of renunciations. "He chose wisely, no doubt, for himself, to be the bachelor of thought and Nature."<sup>1</sup> He was tied to no profession, but one of the activities in which he was constantly engaged even during his retirement at Walden, was writing. Thoreau's approach to literature may be understood both from his numerous explicit statements on the subject scattered over the pages of his works and his own practice as a writer.

One of the safest conclusions we can arrive at is that Thoreau is a serious writer who addresses himself to a serious audience. He is no journalist or popular writer who helps the reader to pass an idle hour. One of his important pronouncements on books is made in *A Week* immediately after a relevant quotation from the *Bhagavat Gita*. Thoreau writes: "Certainly, we do not need to be soothed and entertained always like children.

<sup>1</sup> *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau* (Walden Edition, Boston, 1906), hereafter cited as *Writings*—The 'Biographical Sketch,' I, p. xv.

He who resorts to the easy novel, because he is languid, does no better than if he took a nap. . . . Books, not which afford us a covering enjoyment, but in which each thought is of unusual daring; such as an idle man cannot read, and a timid one would not be entertained by, which even make us dangerous to existing institutions,—such call I good books”.<sup>2</sup> Thoreau's estimate of books is uniformly consistent with this view as we may see in his judgment of Chaucer. Referring to the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, he points out various excellences and beauties, but remarks: “Yet it is essentially humorous, as the loftiest genius never is.”<sup>3</sup> Thoreau himself is not incapable of humour, but it is an insignificant quality in his writings which are admittedly serious.

Thoreau has definite views regarding the choice of subjects in literature. He believes that anything is grist to the mill provided the author has sincerity: “There is always room and occasion enough for a true book on any subject; as there is room for more light the brightest day, and more rays will not interfere with the first”.<sup>4</sup> The main requirement according to Thoreau is that the author should write about his own experience of life: “A book should contain pure discoveries, glimpses of *terra firma*, though by shipwrecked mariners, and not the art of navigation by those who have never been out of sight of land”.<sup>5</sup> Because of his conviction that a good book should be a record of an individual's experience of life, Thoreau believes that more may be learnt from “true, sincere, human books, from frank and honest biographies” than from “learned books”.<sup>6</sup> His own literary practice is an application of this principle. The *Journal*, which he started writing by 1840 and which he continued almost to the end of his life, is a day-to-day record of his daily actions, observations, thoughts and feelings. *A Week* is the description of a river-trip made by him and his brother, John, in 1839 interspersed with numerous interpolations. *Walden* deals with a personal experiment which consti-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 99.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 397.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 112.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 100.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 101.

tute is a central experience in his life and his personal message to contemporary society as well as to posterity. The facts of life are what a man knows best and Thoreau thinks that even fiction is a re-ordering of facts. "To write a true work of fiction even is only to take leisure and liberty to describe some things more exactly as they are. A true account of the actual is the rarest poetry. . . ."<sup>7</sup> Writing in the Journal on October 18, 1856, Thoreau says: "My work is writing, and I do not hesitate, though I know that no subject is too trivial for me, tried by ordinary standards; for, ye fools, the theme is nothing, the life is everything."<sup>8</sup>

In content, a book according to Thoreau should be "as wildly natural and primitive, mysterious and marvellous, ambrosial and fertile, as a fungus or a lichen." Thoreau's description indicates not only his preference for natural themes but also a fresh point of view untrammelled by human conventions and civilization and a vigorous and spontaneous style. "Mere facts and names and dates communicate more than we suspect. Whether the flower looks better in the nosegay than in the meadow where it grew and we had to wet our feet to get it! Is the scholastic air any advantage?"<sup>9</sup> Thoreau believes that the best way to write is to write during moments of inspiration rather than write by "cold resolve." "Write while the heat is in you. . . . The writer who postpones the recording of his thoughts uses an iron which has cooled to burn a hole with. He cannot inflame the minds of his audience".<sup>10</sup> This explains Thoreau's habit of recording his daily thoughts and experiences in his Journal. Materials from the Journal were rearranged and sometimes slightly altered in the preparation of *Week* and *Walden*, but the inspiration of the moment immediately recorded in the Journal has been preserved intact in the revised works.)

With regard to the organization and presentation of his material, Thoreau does not appear in a very favourable light in *Week*. The ostensible theme of the book is a river trip undertaken by him and his brother, but the narrative is overwhelmed

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 347.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, XV, 121.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 239.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, 293.



and obliterated by extraneous material dumped into the book. This material includes long descriptions of scenery and of the *flora* and *fauna* of the region, incidents connected with the history of the locality, critiques on authors and books known to Thoreau and a long essay on Friendship probably based on his experience. The irrelevant material is so predominant that Canby describes the book as "perilously like a library of the shorter works of Henry Thoreau."<sup>11</sup> Lowell, who reviewed the book soon after its publication had complained: "We were bid. to a river-party;—not to be preached at". Without making any positive assertion regarding possible influences which had moulded the structure of *Week*, it may be mentioned here that *The Hitopadesa* of Vishnu Sarma which Thoreau had read and admired and which he refers to in his Journal, has very much the same structure. Thoreau himself comments on this structure:

The story and fabulous portion of this book winds loosely from sentence to sentence as so many oasis in a desert, and is as indistinct as a camel's track between Mourzouk and Darfour. It is a comment on the flow and freshet of modern books. The reader leaps from sentence to sentence, as from one stepping stone to another, while the stream of the story rushes past unregarded.<sup>12</sup>

Presumably Thoreau did not wish *Week* to be a "modern book" and followed the example of Vishnu Sarma.

The author, in Thoreau's view, is not a person timidly asking to be heard but a prophet with a message which he may proclaim to the world with all dignity and confidence. A quality which Thoreau admires in *The Laws of Manu* is this lofty, confident tone: "I cannot read a sentence in the book of the Hindoos without being elevated as upon the table-land of the ghauts. It has such a rhythm as the winds of the desert, such a tide as the Ganges, and seems as superior to criticism as the Himmaleh Mounts. Even at this late hour, unworn by time, with a native and inherent dignity it wears the English dress as in-

<sup>11</sup> Henry Seidel Canby, *Thoreau* (Boston, 1939), p. 272.

<sup>12</sup> *Writings*, I, 153.

differently as the Sanscrit. The great tone of the book is of such severe tension that no time nor accident can relax it".<sup>13</sup> It is this lofty tone which Thoreau has succeeded in reproducing in *Walden*. In this book Thoreau speaks with all the authority and confidence of one who is convinced about the truth and the value of what he has to say. We have a very good illustration of this tone in passages like this :

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is conformed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work.<sup>14</sup>

In *Walden* we find, on the contrary, compactness of structure and uniformity of tone and atmosphere. Materials drawn from the Journal have been used here, but they have been perfectly synthesized and given organic unity. *Walden* is the perfect expression of a mood and a philosophy. The economy which Thoreau practised during the *Walden* period has been extended to the diction and style of the book too. So far as sentences are concerned, Thoreau was always an admirer of precision and conciseness. When he discusses the writings of the ancients like Homer he particularly pays a tribute to their epigrammatic style : "In how few words, for instance, the Greeks would have told the story of Abelard and Heloise, making but a sentence for our classical dictionary,—and then, perchance, have stuck up their names to shine in some corner of the firmament".<sup>15</sup> In *The Hitopadesa* there are hundreds of sentences which Thoreau must have appreciated and which naturally could have influenced his own style. Scattered here and there over the pages of Thoreau's works are jewel-like sentences such as could have been bodily transferred from *The Hitopadesa*. Here are some examples :

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 266.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 60.

Poetry is the mysticism of mankind.

The unconsciousness of man is the consciousness of God.

Nothing was ever so unfamiliar and startling to a man as his own thoughts.

He who receives an injury is to some extent an accomplice of the wrong-doer.

The great thought is never found in a mean dress.

With these may be compared some sentences from *The Hitopadesa*:

What a rich man gives, and what he consumes, that is his real wealth.<sup>16</sup>

A hundred long leagues is no distance for him who would quench the thirst of covetousness.

A proper neglect of riches is the means of preservation.<sup>17</sup>

One prominent characteristic of Thoreau's prose style is his use of analogies. The employment of this device is deliberate because he gives this advice to beginners: "Improve the opportunity to draw analogies. There are innumerable avenues to a perception of the truth."<sup>18</sup> His own use of analogy is illustrated in the following sentences:

Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk.

Just in proportion to the outward poverty is the inward wealth. In cold weather fire burns with a clearer flame.<sup>19</sup>

There is always room and occasion for a true book on any subject; as there is room for more light the brightest day, and more rays will not interfere with the rest.

<sup>16</sup> Veeshnoo Sarma, *The Hitopadesa*, tr. Charles Wilkins (Bath, 1787), p. 37. Hereafter cited as *The Hitopadesa*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> *Writings*, VIII, 457.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 114-115.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 112.

The use of analogies is one of the most frequently used stylistic devices in *The Hitopadesa* as it is generally in all Sanskrit writing. Here are a few specimens from the English translation which Thoreau read :

The mind of a virtuous being cannot be changed, any more than the water of the ocean can be heated with a fire of straw.<sup>22</sup>

If the friendship of the good be interrupted, their minds admit of no long change; as when the stalks of a lotus are broken, the filaments within them are more visibly connected.<sup>23</sup>

The man of virtue may die, yet he becomes not avaricious; as fire may be extinguished, but cannot be cooled.<sup>24</sup>

The trout we find in the milk of Thoreau's style is sufficient circumstantial evidence of the influence of Vishnu Sarma.

What Thoreau ultimately gives us in his writings is the best of his personality and a revelation of the truth which has been vouchsafed to his enquiring spirit. His works are not meant for the casual reader and their aim is not entertainment or delectation. Thoreau dislikes ostentatious and self-conscious morality, but there is indubitably a moral element underlying what he writes. Commenting on the achievement of Irving in his Journal, he writes: "It suggests that the one great rule of composition . . . is to *speak the truth*. This first, this second, this third".<sup>25</sup>

## II

Thoreau regarded himself as a thinker and philosopher. His short life was in a way dedicated to the pursuit of truth and his writings are a faithful record of his findings. Emerson des-

<sup>22</sup> *The Hitopadesa*, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> *Writings*, XIX, 11.

cribed him as "a bachelor of thought and Nature." In his attitude to Nature he shared for a time the Transcendentalist view that Nature is a hieroglyphic or metaphor of the human mind. But he gradually advanced beyond this position and came to the belief that man does not occupy the central position in the Universe but is only an insignificant part of it. Everything created bears the stamp of the creator and therefore all things, whether animate or inanimate, are holy. This is pantheism and in the case of Thoreau it was combined with mysticism. Man realizes his position and sees his oneness with Nature and the God of Nature in and through moments of intuition or empathy in which truth comes to him in "gleams like the flashing of a shield." "Rocks and trees and senseless things," all manifest the glory of God and share the joy which is universal. Thoreau believed that even the Concord River was happy; otherwise it would not have continued in its course for ages without complaint.<sup>26</sup> It was because of Thoreau's conviction that a life lived in communion with Nature was the truest and happiest life that he abandoned all ideas of entering any profession and became a votary of Nature.

Thoreau, however, did not rest in Nature and forget the God of Nature. He writes on March 11, 1842 : "If Nature is our mother, is not God much more? God should come into our thoughts with no more parable than the zephyr into ours ears".<sup>27</sup> In an entry dated September 7, 1851, he writes again, "My profession is to be always on the alert to find God in Nature, to know his lurking-places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas, in Nature."<sup>28</sup> In view of Thoreau's approach to God, it is perhaps futile to identify him with any particular religion; it was most natural that he was eclectic in his views and accepted the best from whatever he knew. We have the following emphatic statement made by him in the course of a discussion of Hinduism :

I pray to be delivered from narrowness, partiality, exaggeration, bigotry. To the philosopher all sects, all nations, are

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, XV, 206-207.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 326.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, 427.

alike. I like Brahma, Hari, Buddha, the Great Spirit, as well as God.<sup>29</sup>

While it would be an insult to Thoreau to associate him with any one religion, it is natural in an Indian interpretation of his beliefs to point out the affiliations he has with Hinduism. Thoreau speaks of his connection with the Hindu in an unpublished portion of the Journal, preserved at Harvard:

The descendant of the religious devotee who dwelt at the roots of trees, with his crust of bread and water jug cools his water today with ice from my well. If I am not a *modern Hindoo* we are near neighbors—and by the vehicle of commerce we quench our thirst and cool our lips at the same well.<sup>30</sup>

We shall now consider in what respects Thoreau may be described in his own words as "a modern Hindoo." First of all he shared the essentially Hindu view that truth has many sides and that dogmatism is the negation of truth. While discussing Goethe, Thoreau regrets that he "wanted that universality of genius which would have appreciated the philosophy of India."<sup>31</sup> He again remarks: "Beside the vast and cosmogonical philosophy of the *Bhagvat Geeta*, even our Shakespeare seems something youthfully green and practical merely."<sup>32</sup> What Thoreau most admires in Hinduism is the absence of dogmatism and what he equally resents in the Christian priests of his time is their intolerance and assertiveness. In an impassioned passage in *Week* he ridicules people who have "their scheme of the universe cut and dried." "The wisest man", he goes on to say, "preaches no doctrines; he has no scheme; he sees no rafter, not even a cobweb against the heavens. It is clear sky."<sup>33</sup> The Hindu approach to truth appeals to Thoreau most because it is not dogmatic. Speaking of this philosophical approach as embodied in *The Laws of Manu* he remarks:

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, 4.

<sup>30</sup> "Thoreau Manuscript Fragments," Folder 15 S (Houghton Library, Harvard University).

<sup>31</sup> *Writings*, I, 149.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 149.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 70-71.

The very indistinctness of its theogony implies a sublime truth. It does not allow the reader to rest in any supreme first cause, but directly hints of a supreamer still which created the last. The divinity is so fleeting that its attributes are never expressed.<sup>34</sup>

Thus the indefiniteness of Thoreau's conception of God makes him indeed a modern Hindu. Hinduism with its pantheism, its pantheon and with all shades of religious faith ranging from the worship of the elements and of animate and inanimate objects including worship of the cow, to the austere intellectuality of *Upanishadic* philosophy is the religion which comes nearest to Thoreau's heart. He is conscious of the kinship as another entry in his Journal shows:

Do you not believe in a God—then? Ha! Ha; That's a good one, Thank God—I never yet answered yes to that question. "And pray what do you call him?" When the Rev. Dr. Wolff asked the Brahman Sheuram "In how many Gods do you believe?" Sheuram replied. "There is one God; but he has many names. The whole earth stands upon the serpent Sheshnag; she has 1000 teeth and 2000 tongues; with every tongue she pronounces every day a new name of God; and this she has done for centuries on centuries, never repeating a name once pronounced."

I would fain do like Sheshnag.<sup>35</sup>

Thoreau may be described as a Hindu from another point of view. Hinduism is a religion for the individual rather than an institutional one. Thoreau was no respecter of laws or restrictive creeds. His strong views on this question are revealed again in his writings. "The man for whom law exists—the man of forms, the conservative—is a tame man."<sup>36</sup> It was possibly Thoreau's preoccupation with the salvation of his own soul

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 275.

<sup>35</sup> 'Thoreau Manuscript Fragments,' Folder 15 L (Houghton Library, Harvard University).

<sup>36</sup> *Writings*, VIII, 173.

that influenced his attitude to social reform. He did not believe in philanthropy or in social reform. Even on a question like the abolition of slavery, Thoreau did nothing more than express his stand and dissociate himself from the actions of government. He hinted at the possibility of collective action but took no initiative in the matter.

The *Bhagavat Gita* which Thoreau read with admiration and understanding, teaches the three-fold path to salvation—through works, through knowledge and through devotion. The path of action did not appeal to Thoreau. Commenting on Krishna's advice to Arjuna to do his duty without fear or hope, Thoreau asks: "What, after all, does the practicalness of life amount to? The things immediate to be done are very trivial. I could postpone them all to hear this locust sing".<sup>37</sup> The path chosen by Thoreau is the path of knowledge. In *Vedanta* philosophy the value of knowledge or self-realization as a means to salvation is recognized. Solitude and meditation are prescribed for the seeker after truth because they help him to withdraw into his own consciousness and to realize the meaning of life and the self through contemplation. Thoreau speaks often of the necessity of loneliness: "Whoever has had one thought quite lonely, and could contentedly digest that in solitude, knowing that none could accept it, may rise to the height of humanity, and overlook all living men as from a pinnacle".<sup>38</sup>

The Walden experiment was nothing more than a withdrawal into the self done for the purpose of self-realization. There was no need to prolong it after the purpose was accomplished. It is said in *The Laws of Manu*:

Let every *Brahman* with fixed attention consider all nature, both visible and invisible, as existing in the divine spirit; for, when he contemplates the boundless universe existing in the divine spirit, he cannot give his heart to iniquity.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 145.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 248.

<sup>39</sup> *Institutes of Hindu Law : or the Ordinances of Manu.*, tr. Sir William Jones—*The Works of Sir William Jones* (London, 1799), III, 460.



Again :

Thus the man who perceives in his own soul the Supreme-Soul present in all creatures, acquires equanimity toward them all, and shall be absorbed at last in the highest essence, even that of the Almighty himself.<sup>40</sup>

Thoreau was undoubtedly influenced by this philosophical approach. Hence he is able to say with sincerity :

We are surrounded by a rich and fertile mystery. May we not probe it, pry into it, employ ourselves about it, a little? To devote your life to the discovery of the divinity in nature or to the eating of oysters, would they not be attended with very different results? <sup>41</sup>

To a mystic the truth is revealed intuitively in moments of inspired perception. Thoreau values these moments more than the rest of life and he values the truth thus originally perceived to all the teachings of conventional religion. In this bold originality Thoreau is like the Hindu sages who sought salvation through unaided self-knowledge. Thoreau speaks of such inspired moments in these words :

Rather we should reverently watch for the least motions, the least scintillations, of thought in the sluggish world, and men should run *to and fro* on the occasion more than at an earthquake. We check and repress the divinity that stirs within us, to fall down and worship the divinity that is dead without us.<sup>42</sup>

Thoreau makes frequent references to the intellectuality of the religion of the Hindus. He compares the Bible with the Hindu scriptures and remarks: "The New Testament is remarkable for its pure morality; the best of the Hindoo Scrip-

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 461.

<sup>41</sup> *Writings*, VIII, 471-472.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 119.

ture, for its pure intellectuality".<sup>43</sup> An entry in the Journal again runs as follows: "With the Hindoos virtue is an intellectual exercise, not a social and practical one. It is a knowing, not a doing".<sup>44</sup> To Thoreau also it is "knowing" that matters, and not "doing." Knowledge by its very nature is not static; it undergoes modifications as well as subtractions and additions. The seeker follows where his intellect leads him and does not try to be consistent. There is no consistency in the philosophical position of Thoreau in all its details. There are shiftings and contradictions which may baffle a person who tries to classify and define. In his conception of the position of man in relation to Nature we find this inconsistency. In an entry in his Journal dated June 29, 1852, he declares: "A lover of Nature is pre-eminently a lover of man. If I have no friend, what is Nature to me? She ceases to be morally significant". In another entry dated July 25 of the same year, he contradicts himself and says: "By my intimacy with nature I find myself withdrawn from man. My interest in the sun and the moon, in the morning and in the evening, compels me to solitude." Clearly there is vacillation in Thoreau's thinking and he is frank enough to record his vacillation and doubt. Regarding transmigration, similarly, Thoreau does not take up a definite position. Once he refers to his belief in reminiscence and transmigration and says: "... As far back as I can remember I have unconsciously referred to the experiences of a previous state of existence ".<sup>45</sup> The belief is not clearly repeated or confirmed and we are left in doubt whether Thoreau is sufficiently convinced in the matter.

Knowing Thoreau's openness of mind and his fearless intellectuality, it is futile to pin him down to any specific creed or article of faith. In fact he hints in an explanation he gives for leaving Walden that he believes in many ways to salvation and not one. This is one of the main teachings of the *Gita*:

One would think twice before he accepted heaven on such terms. A ticket to Heaven must include tickets to Limbo, Purgatory, and Hell. Your ticket to the boxes admits you to

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 142.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, 306.

the pit also. And if you take a cabin passage, you can smoke, at least, forward of the engine,—you have the liberty of the whole boat. But no, I do not wish for a ticket to the boxes, nor to take a cabin passage. I will rather go before the mast on the deck of the world. I have no desire to go “abaft the engine”

This passage defends a return to the world of ordinary men from the world of contemplation. There is room enough in Hindu philosophy for such a somersault and room enough only in Hindu philosophy.

There have been different assessments of Thoreau's philosophical position and his indebtedness to various systems of philosophy. Mark Van Doren feels that the influence of Hinduism is superficial. J. W. Krutch and H. S. Canby admit its influence to a considerable degree while Arthur Christy argues that it was very powerful. The evidence collected in this paper from Thoreau's writings and from the Hindu scriptures which he is known to have read probably justifies Thoreau's reference to himself as “a modern Hindoo”. In fact, it may be asserted that there are many Hindus living in India a century after Thoreau's death who are less acquainted with their scriptures than Thoreau was and whose beliefs and way of life are less Hindu than those of the Brahmin of Concord.

## ONE APPROACH TO O'NEILL

P. S. SASTRI

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EURIPIDES in Greek drama and O'Neill in modern drama stand out prominently as the great representatives of the two great moments in human history. They have much in common. They rebelled against the diction and the conventions of the theatre, brought forth a natural sense of melody, and revealed a profound sense of the dramatic. They tested theories, found shelter in none. Their spiritual yearnings found a new expression in an intensely traditional form. They created a new taste for ideas; and these are combined with morbid aberrations and real but ugly passions. Their problems are those of human beings in so far as the person is human. They are the problems of religion, war, and women, peculiar to man. They tapped mercilessly but judiciously the customs and ideas of man to discover and unravel their hollowness. Here we observe homely people, real human beings, the "intimate things which we know and live with."

O'Neill has in a sense modernised Euripides and brought him up-to-date. He is our new Euripides. Take *Beyond the Horizon* (1920). Robert Mayo, the poet, does not like the farm on which he was put. He wants to move into the far-off lands. The wayward passion of Ruth Atkins does not allow him to go away with his uncle. His brother Andy had to go. Robert fails on the farm, his wife and mother-in-law reproach him and tease him. But he finds consolation in the company of his books and in that of his little daughter. The words spoken by him

at the end on the hill-side reveal the great hope which dominated the life of O'Neill : "Don't you see I'm happy at last—free—free!— freed from the farm—free to wander on and on—eternally, look! isn't it beautiful beyond the hills? I can hear the old voices calling me to come—. And this time I'm going! It isn't the end. It's a free beginning—the start of my voyage ! I've won my trip—the right of release—beyond the horizon!" Here is a triumph over death. Death is a passage for a fuller and a more valuable life of freedom. It beckons to a life of the spirit preceded by a sympathy with human suffering. This life involves the pursuit of the beauty of the far off and the unknown. There is the lure of death in many a play of Euripides as well.

In *The Straw* (1921) O'Neill works out the process by which an initial lie is transformed by a repeated utterance into truth. Stephen Murray's love for Eileen grows as the awareness of her doom becomes stronger. She is overjoyed to find that love has come back to her with death. The dramatist bids himself against death. Stephen might have said with Hippolytus:

Unchaste in passion, chaste in soul was she;  
My passionless purity has dishonoured me.

When Burke and Anna agree to wed in *Anna Christie* (1921), there is "a sentimental gesture of defiance at fate." Burke has a genuine reverence for the purity of woman. He may be vain in believing that he alone can save her. One may recollect Ion blaming Apollo in Euripides, since the god seduced his mother Creusa: "Such conduct! Use violence upon maidens and betray them? Beget children in secret and leave them to die? Come, come! Since you have the power, remember its responsibility. You punish mankind for a wrong-doing."

The dramatisation of fear found in O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1921) has a new technique and an interesting mystical overtone. A West Indian island which was "not yet self-determined by the white marines" is the scene of action. The monologues and the phantoms gradually take us to the funeral speech of Smithers: "E's a better man than the lot of you put-together. I 'ates the sight of him, but I'll say that for 'im." The corrupted soul fears to bear the consequences of its own ac-

tion. At the same time the human soul is heir to the crimes and virtues of its ancestors, and to the ignorance and stupidity of the ages. The final responsibility for the past of human history rests with every present living soul. The theme of alienation from the land is joined to the lure and hostility of the sea. A kind of symbolism helps O'Neill in reinterpreting and re-evaluating the human situation. This weapon is capable of transforming the Greek dramatist beyond recognition since it also contributes to the advance in dramatic art. We get back to the devices of soliloquy and aside emerging from the images and reflections. The stream of consciousness of the characters reveals their hidden motives and illumines the contrast between their inner and outer lives. Here the novelist of mental analysis is fused with the poet and dramatist. Armed with this equipment O'Neill discovers the tragic source in an emotional ill health, in an obsession that limits the character.

The evolution of the primitive to the present state of civilization marks the theme of *The Hairy Ape*. Progress begins when Yank becomes aware of some discontent. The happy stagnation was disturbed by the will, and this will, as Schopenhauer would say, is crushed into a final nothingness. But O'Neill would not say that human life is a futile play of forces, for futility comes in only when life is not properly guided. There is a need "to belong" to a pattern. Yank could not find the ideal democracy. He rejects the partial democracy, and finds peace in death, in the arms of a gorilla. He demands the dream-remembered harmony of a former paradise on earth.

It is in the tragedy of fundamental passions that O'Neill reminds us most of Euripides. *Desire Under the Elms* (1925) is a tragedy of avarice, lust, hatred and jealousy. In *The Great God Brown* (1926) we get back to the Faust legend and witness a cosmic theme. In a moment of agonised exultance, Cybel bursts forth: "Spring again—life again—summer and fall and death and peace again—but always, love and conception and birth and pain again—spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again: bearing the glorious crown of life again." Dion is the creative pagan Dionysus who accepts life and fights against the life-denying religion. Cybel, the pagan Earth Mother, believes in life for its own sake. Margaret seeks to maintain her race

of mortals. Brown is the demi-god of the Unimaginative materialistic civilization. The true individual endeavours to overcome the conflict between life and death by visualising a state of existence beyond this duality. One has to be spiritual and imaginative, at the same time cleaving fast to the Universal mother who is beyond both life and death. The pragmatism of Peirce and James is synthesised with the transcendentalist dream of Emerson and Whitman. Here O'Neill steps into a profound note of mysticism. The same note comes to us in *Marco Millions*, where we find that life and love are the two aspects of the eternal present. This eternal present is a certainty inherent in the very nature of the earthly life: "Be proud of life! know in your heart that the living of life can be noble! know that the dying of death can be noble! Be exalted by life! Be inspired by death! . . . . Be immortal because life is immortal. Contain the harmony of womb and grave within you! Possess life as a lover."

It was this O'Neill who in 1931 turned to modernise the Greek story of Electra in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Fate is replaced by conscience. Like Webster and Ford he explores the morbid by taking us through the labyrinths of passion. There is the tragic predicament of man who struggles for an understanding and a justification of himself in a mysterious and even inimical universe. Plays like this reflect the postwar world which has revealed more uncertainties than before. We have to grapple with what ails us. In this endeavour the dramatist becomes painfully aware of "the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one for the surviving primitive, religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with." Apart from this significant statement, O'Neill also referred elsewhere to "the discordant, broken, faithless rhythm of our time." Such a rhythm led him only to "moving, dramatic inarticulations." Naturally, therefore, his plays are suffused with a rich suggestive symbolism.

This symbolism of O'Neill's tragic vision emerges from the conflict between appearance and reality. One pretends to be something that doesn't fit in with his make-up. The tragic element emerges out of the choice made; and the choice is

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governed by *hubris*. This leads to a suffering "through which we had to pass to prove ourselves worthy of a finer realization." As the suffering deepens, the need for a "belonging" gets intensified. One has to *belong to* something. It is a significant achievement of a modern dramatist that he has come to reveal the impossibility of a secular tragedy. As O'Neill's career points out, with every new play, he has come to emphasize more and more insistently that a spiritual framework alone can make a real tragedy possible. One may note that the last play of Euripides was *The Bacchae*.





## THE CHARACTERS IN ELIOT'S PLAYS

M. K. NAIK

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THE USUAL charge levelled at the characters in Eliot's plays is that they are not "living" characters. Grover Smith observes, "Eliot lacks a ready power of empathy, of self-projection into the points of view of others. . . . His personages, however artfully posed in a fictitious setting or made articulate by a noble rhetoric, are too often more masks than characters, if not patently himself. . . . In no play . . . of Eliot's . . . is there pure realization of an external character."<sup>1</sup> But it is pertinent to ask whether it was part of Eliot's dramatic aim and practice to create "living" characters. If he was marching to a different drum, would it not be unfair to court-martial him for not keeping in step with Shakespeare?

Eliot's writings on drama and dramatists show that he had of course a clear understanding of what constitutes a "living" character. His essay on Philip Massinger contains a trenchant definition of a living character : "A living character is not necessarily 'true to life'. It is a person whom we can see and hear, whether he be true or false to human nature as we know it. What the Creator of character needs is not so much knowledge of motives as keen sensibility, the dramatist need not understand people; but he must be exceptionally aware of them."<sup>2</sup> Judged by the standards of romantic criticism of Shakespeare, which was seriously concerned about the exact size of Lady

<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot's *Poetry and Plays* (Chicago, 1950), p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> *Selected Essays* (London, 1932), p. 212.

Macbeth's family, the length of Iago's military service, and what subject *Hàmlet* majored in at the university of Wittenberg, Eliot's idea of a "living" character would be somewhat broad. But in his own plays he was not perhaps aiming at creating even his own type of "living" characters.

Eliot's own conception of poetic drama clearly indicates the kind of the characters to be expected in his plays. The following observation in his *A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry* is revealing: "The human soul, in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse. . . . The tendency . . . of prose drama is to emphasise the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse."<sup>3</sup> The speaker here is not Eliot himself but "A." Nevertheless, Eliot has virtually repeated what "A" says here at several other places, notably in *Poetry and Drama*:

Beyond the namable, classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action—the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express—there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action . . . . This peculiar range of sensibility can be expressed by dramatic poetry, at its moments of greatest intensity.<sup>4</sup>

In Eliot's own dramatic practice, the attempt to express this "peculiar range of sensibility" was circumscribed by the one dominant theme on which all his plays are variations—namely, the quest for self-fulfilment. The nature of this quest which all his major characters undertake is indicated in a highly significant analysis of the two selves in *Man* made by Edward in *The Cocktail Party*:

"The self that can say 'I want this—or want that'—  
The self that wills—he is a feeble creature;

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Selected Prose* (London, 1953), p. 85.

He has to come to terms in the end  
With the obstinate, the tougher self; who does not speak,  
Who never talks, who cannot argue;  
And who in some men may be the guardian—  
But in men like me, the dull, the implacable,  
The indomitable spirit of mediocrity.  
The willing self can contrive the disaster  
Of this unwilling partnership—but can only flourish  
In submission to the rule of the stronger partner.”<sup>5</sup>

The quest in which all Eliot's major characters are engaged in the attempt to make the feeble, self-centred, desire-ridden self come to terms with the “tougher” self, which if properly developed can play a role similar to that of Plato's “guardians,” who were noble-minded and altruistic public servants. Given scope, it leads a person to self-knowledge and self-fulfilment, thus making for salvation. Denied scope, it leaves the feeble, self-centred self to dominate the personality which therefore lacks vision and remains blind to spiritual values.

In the light of this analysis, all Eliot's characters can be divided into three groups: those in whom the “tougher” self is already well-developed, so that they not only have a firm grasp of the true values, but can also initiate the worthy into vision; those in whom this better self has a high potential which is developed during the course of the play; and those in whom it can never develop and come into its own. The three groups may be characterized as the helpers, the seekers and the blind respectively. The first have already attained Paradise; the second are in Purgatory; the third must remain in Hell which is only “oneself” as Edward observes in *The Cocktail Party*.<sup>6</sup> The Eliot protagonist belongs to the second group and is usually flanked by one or both the other types. In *Sweeney Agonistes*, which remained a fragment, this structure is yet in its formative stage. Sweeney here seems to combine the roles of the helper and the seeker. In himself, he is a seeker (unlike the Sweeney of the shorter poems, who is one of the blind) who

<sup>5</sup> *Collected Plays* (London, 1962), pp. 153-54.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

is aware of more things in life and beyond than are dreamt of in the philosophy of his worthless friends who belong to the group of the blind. But in his struggle to explain to them what he has seen (Orestes's "You don't see them, you don't—but I see them," which forms one of the mottos of the play, is significant in this respect), he seems to take on the role of the helper too. Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral* also combines the roles of the helper and the seeker, but for entirely different reasons. The exigencies of historical fact make it imperative that Becket should work out his own salvation. The tempters represent the element of the "blind" in Becket which he overcomes with the help of his "tougher" self.

The pattern of the three groups of characters is mostly clearly seen in *The Family Reunion*. Agatha is the helper here. She has known moments of fulfilment when "there seems to be no past or future, / Only a present moment of pointed light/ When you want to burn."<sup>7</sup> Hence, she is able to make Harry realize the true nature of his malady and can also suggest the solution which is "the pilgrimage of expiation." In his own small way, Downing too is a helper. Though he is no intellectual, his affection for his master has given him an insight into Harry's character. That is why he knows that his master would not remain long at Wishwood, and he keeps the car ready for the departure. But the affection that makes one a helper must be a selfless affection. That is why Mary cannot help Harry, because her love for Harry is not the kind which gives everything and asks for nothing in return. Therefore, in Part I, Scene II, when Harry has started hoping that he could perhaps escape the Furies with the help of Mary's love, the Eumenides appear to warn him that there are no shortcuts to salvation, and human love can provide no escape while the debt to the past remains unpaid; and when the debt is paid, love will appear as a dead end. Harry's mother, his two aunts—Ivy and Violet—and his uncles are the blind; for, in them the willing self is excessively active. Each one wants Harry to do something: Amy wants him to settle down as a country gentleman and perpetuate the Monchensey line; Gerald the ex-soldier would like him "to see

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

about a couple of new hunters"; Charles the man about town has "a new wine merchant to recommend"; Ivy who fancies herself as a garden-expert urges him to sack the gardener; and Violet, who consistently sees the dark cloud in preference to the silver lining, advises him to pack off Mrs. Packell from the kitchen. None of them understands Harry's plight, because they all live on a lower plane from where they can have no access to the spiritual struggle in which Harry is engaged.

Chronologically, *The Family Reunion* (1939) occupies a central position in Eliot's dramatic career. It is therefore significant that this pattern of the three groups should be so clearly projected in this play. In the two plays preceding it—*Sweeney Agonistes* (1926-27) and *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935)<sup>8</sup>—the contrasted roles of seeker and the blind one are the most prominent, the helper not yet having clearly emerged as a separate character. During the ten years that separate *The Family Reunion* from *The Cocktail Party* (1949) Eliot had developed and expressed a ripe and constructive philosophy of life in *The Four Quartets*. It is therefore, equally, revealing that in the plays from *Cocktail Party* onwards, the two roles of the seeker and the helper should achieve prominence, while the blind virtually disappear; because, for the mellow Eliot, "none does offend." No one is perhaps stark blind; there are only degrees of vision. So seekers turn into helpers of other seekers. There is "first aid all round," as Gordon remarked about the characters in Shakespearean comedy.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in *The Cocktail Party*, Celia, Edward, Lavinia, and Peter are all seekers. Celia and the Chamberlaynes see light—though in different ways—much before Peter does; and in the last scene, the Chamberlaynes actually try to teach Peter what they themselves have learnt. Reilly, the chief helper, is ably assisted by Julia and Alex, the "guardians." Colby in *The Confidential Clerk* is the chief seeker who achieves his quest with the guidance of the helpers—Eggerson and Mrs. Guzzard. But the process by which Colby comes to see light also benefits a host of minor seekers. At the end, Sir Claude and his wife have

<sup>8</sup> *The Rock* (1934), in which Eliot wrote only the choruses, is not relevant to this argument.

<sup>9</sup> *Shakespearean Comedy and Other Studies* (London, 1944), p. 19.

come to understand each other as they never had before, and Lucasta's conflicts have been resolved. The case of Kaghan, however, is most revealing. This blustering, egotistical go-getter would, in the earlier Eliot, have perhaps become an example of the blindest of the blind; and in him perhaps would have been illustrated the truth of Tagore's maxim—"Darkness travels towards light; but blindness towards death."<sup>10</sup> Here, the later Eliot's abounding grace saves him. The mask of the brash go-getter is torn off, and the face of the serious sensitive young man beneath is revealed, as he tells Sir Claude in the end: "Both Lucasta and I/Would like to mean something to you... if you'd let us;/And we'd take the responsibility of meaning it."<sup>11</sup>

In Eliot's swan-song, *The Elder Statesman*, also, there is a common pursuit of salvation in which all join—Lord Claverton's liberation comes only when he faces boldly the ghosts from his shady past, Gomez and Mrs. Carghill. But liberation is like perfume. You cannot give it to others without sharing the benefit yourself. So, the "ghosts" themselves gain from the confrontation. There is no doubt a certain ambiguity in the presentation of Gomez, and, human motives being a curious mixture of the good and the bad, it is possible to interpret Gomez's actions in a sinister light as David E. Jones has done.<sup>12</sup> But the pervading spirit of the play is one of serenity, and "pardon is the word for all." Hence, it would perhaps not be wrong to suggest that in helping Michael, Lord Claverton's son, in the end, Gomez is, in a way, seeking his own salvation. Perhaps, he sees in Michael an image of what he himself had been as a young man; and now from the vantage ground of age he would sincerely like to help the young man to start a new life without undergoing the trials which he himself had to face in a similar situation. Of course, the irony of his helping the son of Dick Ferry could not have been lost upon him, and perhaps this does give him the secret satisfaction of a revenge. But that he is not dragging Michael into total ruin is suggested by Monica's comment—"If he [Michael] prospers, that will give him confidence—[It's

<sup>10</sup> *Collected Poems and Plays* (London, 1958), p. 311.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>12</sup> *The Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London, 1960), pp. 204-05.

only self-confidence that Michael is lacking."]<sup>13</sup> Again, the plan to help Michael is not Gomez's invention —another indication that he is not a melodramatic villain. It is Mrs. Carghill who thinks of it, and she is too much of the scatter-brained, garrulous, sentimental "old flame" to be sinister. In any case, the two "ghosts" from the hero's past have helped him to achieve self-knowledge and the serenity that comes from it.

The pattern of characterization that emerges from a study of Eliot's plays thus indicates that his major characters are symbolic of certain states of being and must be judged as such. But, except *Murder in the Cathedral*, all Eliot's plays deal with modern life, and have a modern social setting. Realistic character-drawing would seem to be imperative in a drama of this kind; and to yoke symbolic major characters with "living" minor characters would have resulted in an incongruous mixture. Eliot seems to solve the problem by making his minor characters well-established dramatic types. In *The Family Reunion*, of Harry's two uncles, Gerald, as noted earlier, is the typical retired soldier, and Charles the man about town. Of his two aunts, Ivy, who "would go south in winter," is the type of woman who must do the socially right thing; while Violet is the censorious spinster. Sergeant Winchell is the old, garrulous, and rather dense village policeman—the local Dogberry. Julia and Alex in *The Cocktail Party* represent two types—the first, an inquisitive old chatterbox, the second the eccentric diplomat. Hoary comic types have a field-day in *The Confidential Clerk*, with its farcical plot: Lady Elizabeth, the rich aristocratic lady with the bee of spiritualism in her costly bonnet; Mrs. Guzzard, the fairy godmother with a comic name; B. Kaghah; the brash young financier; and Lucasta, the gay, irresponsible career-girl. (Both she and Kaghah have their serious side which is revealed in the end—but that is a part of the symbolic design.) The lovers in *The Elder Statesman* are types; the talkative Mrs. Piggott is a not entirely unworthy literary grand-daughter of Sarah Gamp; while Gomez and Mrs. Carghill were obviously suggested by blackmailers in melodrama, though as "ghosts" in the symbolic pattern they have, as already explained, a different

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 352.



significance. In fact, all these minor characters have their own part to play in the total symbolic design of Eliot's drama, and the fact that they are types makes it easier for them to put on the symbolic mantle without producing a jarring effect.'

Furthermore, many characters and situations in Eliot's plays have been traced by critics to classical originals: Reilly bringing back Lavinia to Edward in *The Cocktail Party* is Heracles restoring Alcestis to Admetus; and so on. This again indicates that in his character-creation Eliot was not working within the realist convention, but was trying to project characters which would represent spiritual dilemmas as valid in ancient Greece as in modern England.

This does not, however, mean that Eliot lacked the ability to create living characters. This ability had already been revealed in his poetry, before he turned to drama. Prufrock and the spinster in *Portrait of a Lady* are perfectly realized characters. Both the empty social chatter of the society lady in the earlier half of "A Game of Chess" in *The Waste Land* and the racy Cockney speech of Lil in the latter half show perfect mastery of devising a dramatic speech which is entirely in character. In the plays also, Eliot goes as far in the realist convention as he safely can, without damaging the symbolic fabric. Thus, the speech of many of his minor personages is perfectly adapted to character. Kaghan in *The Confidential Clerk* provides a good example of this. When he tells Colby, "I make decisions on the spur of the moment, [But you'd never take a leap in the dark;] You'd keep me on the rails,"<sup>14</sup> the clichés tripping over one another in his speech indicate the kind of man he appears to be to others—the rising young businessman with no nonsense about him. The speech of Sergeant Winchell and Downing the chauffeur in *The Family Reunion* is quite in character. In *The Elder Statesman*, the stiff, formal, official tone of Lord Claverton is well contrasted with the easy, colloquial style of Gomez; and the inane patter of Mrs. Carghill is offset by the lyrical note in the dialogue of the lovers. But this is the sole concession that Eliot makes to the realist convention, in view of the contemporary setting of all the plays, except one; and it is significant

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 252.

that most of his protagonists—the seekers—use almost the same kind of language, in which symbolic images of light and darkness and illumination, of door and garden and desert predominate.<sup>15</sup>

It is manifest, then, that the test of “living” characters is beside the point in evaluating Eliot’s characters, who have a symbolic role to play in projecting the drama of self-discovery and salvation. Nor can this absence of “living” characters be regarded as a flaw in Eliot’s drama. The cult of the ‘living’ character was a product of nineteenth-century individualism. Hence the supreme pre-occupation of Bradley and his school with endless motive-hunting in studying Shakespeare. Modern playwrights have often tended to regard character as one element in the total dramatic design, but by no means the one of prime importance. In his Foreword to *Miss Julie*, Strindberg observes, “In regard to character-drawing, I have made my figures rather characterless,”<sup>16</sup> with the result that, as F. L. Lucas notes, “The one unforgettable character in Strindberg is—Strindberg.”<sup>17</sup> W. B. Yeats complains, “Our dogma of the printed criticism is that if a play does not contain definite character, its constitution is not strong enough for the stage, and that the dramatic moment is always the contest of character with character. . . . Yet, when we go back a few centuries and enter the great periods of drama, character grows less and sometime disappears.”<sup>18</sup> Shaw frankly made his characters his mouthpieces and built eminently stageworthy plays round them. Nor does the “epic theatre” of Brecht have much use for “living” characters. In fact, G. P. Baker’s dictum—“A play which aims to be real in depicting life must illustrate character by characterization which is in character”<sup>19</sup>—would hold true only in the case of plays within the realist convention. When a playwright work-

<sup>15</sup> See the present writer’s “The Imagery of Eliot’s Plays”, *Journal of the Karnatak University*, IX (Dharwar 1965), 69-79.

<sup>16</sup> *Eight Famous Plays*, trans. Edwin Bjorkman and N. Erichsen (London, 1949), p. 106.

<sup>17</sup> *The Drama of Ibsen and Strindberg* (London, 1962), p. 462.

<sup>18</sup> “The Tragic Theatre,” *The Cutting of an Agate* (London, 1919), pp. 27-28.

<sup>19</sup> *Dramatic Technique* (Boston, 1919), p. 308.

ing outside this convention is trying to project his dramatic vision, his characters must be judged not by the standards relevant to the realist convention, but by their ability to re-create this dramatic vision. Judged by this principle, Eliot's characters will appear to have been highly successful in the part they play in his dramatic vision of salvation which, in spite of its realistic setting, does not belong to the realist convention. If a parallel to them is to be sought it could be found in the characters of Ben Jonson, who, with his "humours" in a realistic setting, created a drama as successful as any—with the difference that Eliot's is a kind of "Divine Comedy of Humours" in which the protagonists struggle to reach the distant shores of light.

## WRIGHT MORRIS AND THE TERRITORY AHEAD

NALINI V. SHETTY

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IN AN interview given to Samuel Bleufarb in 1958, Morris expressed the following opinion on his own work : "... I believe that perhaps few writers of my time write so much out of all their books, so that an exposure to all the books in a way is necessary to the book that comes next." Although no author need be taken expressly at his word, in the case of Morris the need for such a "conditioned" reader is acutely felt. It is only the "conditioned" and "cultivated" reader—someone who has made a careful study of many of Morris' novels and his critical tenets—who is able to grasp the meaning and quality of events and see them in as bright a light as the author intends.

The necessity for an "educated" reader is not because Morris is an artist whose primary aim is "self-expression" and not "communication." He has always made it clear that whatever private vision an artist may evoke, it is valid only if made relevant to the world of the reader. Those stumbling blocks to an ordinary reader—tricky narrative techniques, unreliable narrators—are not encountered in Morris. The necessity for an "exposure" to Morris in order to get the full significance of what he has to offer arises from the fact that he is a complicated and deliberate artist in the medium he has chosen for his major expression, the novel. In his book of criticism, *The Territory*

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Bleufarb, "Point of View: An Interview with Wright Morris, July, 1958," *Accent*, XIX (Winter, 1959), 36.

*Ahead*, we get a clear understanding of the criteria by which Morris judges his precursors in American literature and which have governed his own work.

One of the reasons for the difficulty which an ordinary reader experiences with Morris is his attitude toward the raw material of experience. For him, what we see, hear, or suffer, is a mystery until the imagination gives it form. For a life that is more real than life, raw experience has to be processed by the imagination. "Fiction would seem to be the way it is processed into reality. If this were not so we should have little excuse for art. Life, raw life, would be more than satisfactory in itself."<sup>2</sup> It becomes an act of supreme importance, therefore, for Morris the artist, that he should process his experience. As he sees it, the problem for himself and the nineteenth-century American writers whom he examines in *The Territory Ahead*, is an excess of raw experience. "Raw material, an excess of both material and comparatively raw experience, has been the dominant factor in my own role as a novelist. The thesis I put forward grows out of my experience, and applies to it. . . . I had led, or rather been led by, half a dozen separate lives. Each life had its own milieu; it frequently appeared to have its own beginning and ending, the only connecting tissue being the thread of my *self*. I had been *there*, but that, indeed, explained nothing. In an effort to come to terms with the experience, I processed it in fragments, collecting pieces of the puzzle. In time, a certain over-all pattern *appeared* to be there. But this appearance was essentially a process—an imaginative act of apprehension—rather than a research into the artifacts of my life. The realization that I had to create coherence, conjure up my synthesis, rather than find it, came to me, as it does to most Americans, disturbingly late" (TA, 15). This synthesis which he tried to "conjure up," this "coherence" which he had to "create," is seen at its various stages in the different books. The fragmentary approach to experience, which Morris confesses is compulsive in him, is reflected in his writing. This is far from saying that Morris' books are not artistic wholes. But the themes which we

<sup>2</sup> Wright Morris, *The Territory Ahead* (New York, 1963), pp. 228-29; hereafter cited parenthetically as TA.

find in the early novels recur in almost all the books. It is not, however, mere repetition. The same themes are viewed and reviewed from different positions so that each time a new facet stands revealed. It is a gradually enriching vision which the reader encounters, and the process of growth for the artist is the excitement of discovery for the reader.

For example, the effect of a "hero" on his "witness," a theme which finds simple statement in *My Uncle Dudley*, is picked up in *The Man Who Was There*. But here the primary concern is with defining the qualities of a hero. This theme evolves in *The Huge Season*, in which the point of view of the witness elaborates for us the nature of the hold which the hero has over him. In *The Field of Vision*, the preoccupation is with the creative power which resides in man's ability to transform himself and his witnesses. The seeds of this main idea are found in all the three books, for the effect of a hero is to transform his witness. But, after this later illumination, the earlier books become more evocative. In one sense, what is true of Morris is true of any major writer who persists in his individual view of the world. However, this recurrence is not confined only to themes and ideas. Throughout the Morris canon we find a recurring use of little vignettes, conversation pieces, and artifacts. But these symbols do not accrete meaning in progressive order. This is where their difficulty, and sometimes obtuseness, arises. It is the reader who has read all the books in which a particular symbol occurs who gets the most from them. What is true of themes and symbols, holds true for characters also. In answer to a question about these recurring characters and the common store of memory exploited in all the books, Morris says that "... these are keys to the house of fiction. A writer shapes them to open doors with them. The room and the view will be different but the key is the same."<sup>3</sup> It is the different room and the different view which hold the reader to Morris. And the keys? They are almost all found in *The Inhabitants* and *My Uncle Dudley*. The excitement of these two early books is the excitement of holding all the keys to the discovery—of

<sup>3</sup> Wright Morris, "Letter to a Young Critic," *The Massachusetts Review*, VI, 1 (Autumn-Winter, 1964-65), 95.

Morris and of his America.

What Morris tries to do in *The Territory Ahead* is basically what he has done with his own experience. It is an attempt to process his experience of American literature in order to make this heritage truly his own. "Raw material, the great variety of it," writes Morris, "has been the central ornament of American writing since Thoreau went to Walden and Whitman took to the open road" (TA, 22). In this early world of abounding raw material the problem before the writer was one of selection. When Whitman sounded the note and said, "I was there, I saw, and I suffered," he did not proceed to give us *all* the facts. In *Leaves of Grass*, the artist's imagination looks *behind* the facts as well as out of them. Those apparent celebrations of natural and real life, *Walden*, *Leaves of Grass*, *Huckleberry Finn*, are without exception triumphs of craft. When a writer failed, it was the raw material which invariably defeated him. When Melville observed that it was not so much paucity as superabundance of material that incapacitated a writer, he was articulating the difficulties which he and his friends faced in their need to domesticate the immensity of a continent. Morris' view is that the vitality of early American writing had its source in the immense stockpile of raw material which the artist had at hand. With the gradual exhaustion of this resource and the passing of the last natural frontier, the modern American writer is faced with the problem of diminishing raw material. All available raw material has been processed into fiction. "What was once raw about American life has now been dealt with so many times that the material we begin with is itself a fiction, one created by Twain, Eliot, or Fitzgerald. *From Here to Eternity* reminds us that young men are still fighting Hemingway's war. After all, it is the one they know best: it was made real and coherent by his imagination" (TA, 13). What the contemporary writer has left is an overwhelming accumulation of clichés. But every cliché once had its moment of truth. The function of the contemporary writer is to revivify the cliché he has inherited by a reprocessing. In this attempt, as in life, the transforming power is that of the imagination which processes and repossesses. *The Territory Ahead*, Morris claims, is an act of reappraisal. "Reappraisal is repossession . . .

In such a fashion I seek to make my own what I have inherited as clichés. To make new we must reconstruct as well as resurrect. The destructive element in this reconstruction is to remove from the object the encrusted cliché. . . . Reappraisal is an act of re-creation in which the work of art is the raw material" (TA, Foreword). In this world of diminishing raw material, only style and technique can help the writer overcome this fatal handicap of over-processed material. "Only a formidable genius, only a formidable technique," claims Morris, "can find in such material fresh and vital elements" (TA, 10). Therefore, a part of Morris' battle against the cliché is his mercilessly disciplined way of writing and his handling of the clichés in the language. The style which Morris has forged is an important testament to the vitality of the American language.

The predominant tendency, however, Morris observes, of most American writers from Hawthorne to Faulkner has been to return to the raw material reservoir. It is the mythic past which has generated what is memorable (and not so memorable) in American literature. "Literally, like Thoreau, or figuratively, like Faulkner, our writers of genius face backward while their countrymen resolutely march forward. . . . For more than a century the territory ahead has been the world that lies somewhere behind us, a world that has become, in the last few decades, a nostalgic myth" (TA, Foreword). It is the nostalgic myth which cripples the imagination, points out Morris.

Morris' basic insight in *The Territory Ahead* is the problem of the past and its perils for the individual, especially the writer. A deep-seated trait of American character, for Morris, is its chronic tendency to dream. One avenue for the dreamer is his own past: youth, adolescence, young manhood. Another is the heroic past of his country. Thus, in *Ceremony in Lone Tree*, we have Lois McKee held enthralled by the one kiss she had from Gordon Boyd. Middle-aged Bud Momeyer stalks around at night with his hand-made Indian bows and arrows. The incapacity to live and face the problems of the present and the flight into the past which is a trait of the American character, was also the problem of the nineteenth-century American writer in his choice of subject matter. He took to the woods or the high seas. The contemporary writer achieves this flight through



nostalgia. In every instance, the effect is to rule out the idea of the present and dwell only in the past. A cursory look at Morris' fiction which weaves the past into its texture might lead us to believe that he is caught in the thrall of exactly what he warns against. A close examination, however, reveals that his concern with the past is primarily an effort to reassess and repossess it. The drama and interest of Morris' books lies in the process whereby he works his way out of nostalgia. At least one character in each book concerning itself with the past perceives his captivity in the past and conceptualizes the struggle and the necessity to escape. A notable example of such a character is Foley in *The Huge Season*.

Certain ideas form the central preoccupation of Morris's criticism. These ideas receive examination from a variety of fictional perspectives and find artistic expression in more than one book. Morris subjects a problem to examination and re-examination from different angles and in varying fictional contexts, until his vision finds its *ne plus ultra*. Only then is he able to move on to something new. In various critical articles and interviews, in a variety of contexts, Morris has stressed what one of the characters in *The Field of Vision* calls the necessity of the mind to have lines to the past, to have "connection." The idea that a man must have connection either with the land or his own past finds a place in almost all of Morris' work. This "connection" is a spiritual process. Whether or not a man achieves this communion is up to the man, says one of the "speaking voices" in *The Inhabitants*. The importance of this spiritual and imaginative act is seen in *The Home Place*, where the necessity to make "connections" is the motivation behind Clyde Muncy's return to the home place where he had spent his childhood. The process of making the "connection" is given detailed artistic representation in the book. The major stumbling block which Morris' heroes encounter in their quest for identity through a connection with their own past and with the collective American experience, is nostalgia. Therefore, coequal with this necessity to establish one's connections with one's past is the imperative need to come to terms with, and emerge from, a nostalgic immersion in the past. The need to establish his "connections," his roots, and an effort to come to terms with what Morris calls

"the standard and deep commitment to nostalgia that almost every writer has"<sup>4</sup>, is the immediate concern of Clyde Muncy, a writer by profession and the hero of *The Home Place* and *The World in the Attic*. It is in the effort of the hero to overcome nostalgia that Morris shows the tremendous influence of the art of Fitzgerald on his imagination—specifically *The Great Gatsby*. The aesthetic detachment, with which Fitzgerald handles his own nostalgia and gives it an objective conceptualization in that book has inspired Morris in his own attempt to move out of his nostalgia into his territory ahead. In *The Territory Ahead*, by an act of reappraisal and repossession Morris purges himself of a nostalgic commitment to the brilliant writers who preceded him in the 1920's. In fiction, the characters and the author of *The Huge Season* face the problem of nostalgia: both Morris and his creature Foley are working their way out of their nostalgic commitment to the Twenties.

For the writer, nostalgic commitment to the writers who have preceded him poses a dual threat: bondage of both mind and spirit. He is faced with clichés in subject matter and language. He is neither able to rid himself of bondage to the subjects which have been dealt with before, nor is he able to forge a new and vital language. Curiously, it is only after *The Huge Season* which celebrates a ceremonial emergence from "immersion" in the past, which is "immolation," that Morris is able to tackle head-on this problem of the cliché in subject matter and language. In his next book, *The Field of Vision*, Morris makes the bullfight, which has become a cliché since the Fiesta at Pamplona, the symbolic parallel for a ceremony of the imaginative act. As the matadors face the bulls with sword and cape, and transform the encounter into a work of art, and the parade of horses, bulls, and men enacts an allegory on life, the drama which unfolds for us is in the consciousness of the characters and their intersecting reflections on the shared events of their past lives. Again and again, while the bulls come into the bullring and encounter the deathly transformation of cape and sword, the characters attempt to grasp imaginatively the facts of their lives. In assessing the facts of his past life, "each man [is] his

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Bleufarb, p. 45.

own bullfighter" and faces his own center, "a circle overlapped by countless other circles."<sup>5</sup> The title of the book refers to what the characters make of the events in the bullring (to McKee, one of the prosaic characters, the matadors coming with their capes are men in slings) and also refers ironically to the dreams and unrealistic constructions the characters give to the events in their life. One of the characters, Scanlon, exemplifies an extreme retreat into a reality created solely by the imagination; from being the man who knew yarns about Buffalo Bill, he becomes Buffalo Bill. He is an extreme and macabre example of "self-transformation": of the power of the mind to create "a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" mentioned in the epigraph to the book. In transforming himself so completely, Scanlon has sacrificed his ability to live in the world. The hero's quest, however, is to discover how to transform himself and others and yet continue to live in the world of time and flux. The metaphor of the bullfight is given a reprocessing in *The Field of Vision* and is revitalized into a metaphor for transformation. In this fashion, in *The Huge Season* and *The Field of Vision*, Morris finds release from the giants of the Twenties, Fitzgerald and Hemingway.

Morris' first book *My Uncle Dudley* was published in 1942; his latest, *One Day*, was as recent as February 1965. In twenty-three years he has produced a sizeable body of work: fifteen works of fiction, a smattering of short stories, numerous critical articles and one considerable book of criticism. It is interesting to note that it is only after *The Huge Season* (1954) and *The Field of Vision* (1956), the ninth and the tenth books respectively, that Morris attempts any depiction of the contemporary scene. All the books leading up to these two have either dealt with experiences in his personal past, the American historical past, or the complex relationship of the American male with the American female. In 1957, in *Love Among the Cannibals*, Morris, like his creature Foley, seems to have put behind his concern with the past and its captivities. The action of this novel and those which follow (with the sole exception of *Cause for Wonder*) takes place in a world where the past does

<sup>5</sup> Wright Morris, *The Field of Vision* (New York, 1956), p. 193.

not intrude—because it is non-existent. In all the books following *My Uncle Dudley*, the subject of the past has preoccupied Morris. We can trace his attitude from one where he considers the past as real and desirable, to a more sceptical one which questions the value of the past, and then to a stance where the past is viewed as something to be outgrown and escaped from, if one is to function in the present. The approach to the present has thus been gradual. Over a period of eight novels, the once dominant past is made to recede until, in *Love Among the Cannibals*, we are only in the present and the effort is to come to terms with it. Here he is engaged, like D. H. Lawrence, in dealing with "the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present." It is a more difficult task than dealing with the past since "there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying . . ." <sup>6</sup> A running motif in *Love Among the Cannibals*, which points up the fluxional nature of the present is the song called, "What Next?" which the hero Horter, a song writer, and his partner Irwin MacGregor (called Mac) have written just before the action of the novel opens. At every turn we are confronted with the question, "What Next?" and the answer unfolds in the living present. In the present, Horter becomes excruciatingly aware that everything which surrounds him is "phony." He is aware that every sentiment had its own pitch, the way that every generation has its own sentiments . . . . The pitch we hear today, the phony pitch, is absolutely right for the phony sex, the phony sentiment . . . . The word for it is slobism." <sup>7</sup> As early as *The Inhabitants*, Morris has tried to make the distinction between what he calls the "phony" and the "real." The once "real" thing becomes "phony," becomes the cliché in the present. And yet the cliché was once live and vibrant with meaning, Morris points out. <sup>8</sup> When it was first used, it was the real thing. By its being used without genuine feeling it becomes spurious, and it degenerates into the cliché. Morris' basic vision of modern society is that superficiality and spuriousness are its trademarks. The major

<sup>6</sup> D. H. Lawrence, quoted in Morris, TA, p. 230.

<sup>7</sup> Wright Morris, *Love Among the Cannibals* (New York, 1957), p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Wright Morris, "Made in U.S.A., " *American Scholar*, XXIX (Autumn, 1960), p. 488.

thematic concern in *Love Among the Cannibals* and *What a Way to Go* is the fact that modern life is flooded with clichés. These clichés encloud modern man's vision and lead him in quest of inessentials. He is not able to live with any degree of vitality in the immediate present until he is able to come to terms with the clichés which surround him and rid himself of these inessentials. In these books, Morris explores improvisation as the means by which the cliché can be transformed. It is appropriate to look first at Morris' views on the cliché as they are found expressed in other contexts.

Morris defines the cliché in fiction as "anything that has served its purpose . . . . It is the responsibility of first-rate art to avoid second-hand experience. The writer must come to terms with experience in fresh terms. . . ." <sup>9</sup> The depiction of experience in terms which have already been used makes for staleness in language and falsity of emotion. Distinction and vitality can be brought in again by processing the language anew, so as to make it an instrument able to cope with experience in a fresh and compelling way. With regard to the *subject* of fiction, Morris notices in *The Territory Ahead* that the bane of the modern American writer is that the raw-material reservoir which he once had, has now been drained dry. All that remains is raw material which has been already processed and this is dished up repeatedly for mass-media consumption by giving it a gloss of sentiment. Norman Rockwell draws fire from Morris for this reason: the scenes he portrays so realistically (for example, the tomboy with the black eye) are not valid in present actuality. They find a public because they are steeped in sentiment and appeal to the popular nostalgia for a past which is no more. Rockwell's pictures are, therefore, not art.

In his everyday life also modern man surrounds himself with objects which have lost their meaning and in effect have become clichés. The mass-produced coonskin hat sits on the heads of millions of youngsters. The courage of Davy Crockett, of which it was once the symbol, is now forgotten and the hat has therefore no effect on the imagination of the young wearer. The insidious and total effect of the devitalization of language, fiction, and

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Bleufarb, p. 41.

the artifacts of modern life is seen in the American character. "Character . . . is primarily an imaginative act, a fiction to which the flesh is incurably responsive. It is the fiction that shapes the fact. In a crude but instructive way it is no accident that the world's fairest morsels, as of the moment are disturbingly alike. It is little more than a question of measurements."<sup>10</sup> Thus, in *Love Among the Cannibals*, the Hollywood beach can only turn up Billie Harcum, who is a "cliché made flesh." Her personality and measurements have been molded by the clichés of newstand literature. But hope lies in the fact that "every cliché once had its moment of truth. At the moment of conception it was a new and wonderful thing."<sup>11</sup> The aim therefore is to bring the "newness" back to the cliché and to revivify it. Morris sees the solution in improvisation, which can make something old into something new. It brings freshness to a stale thing by its audacious alterations. But Morris is careful to stress that it "lacks staying power. . . In the exercise of will and imagination that generates great art, the improvising flair is a tool but not an end."<sup>12</sup> The mandate which Morris gives to Americans with "loose and confused lives" and to the writer faced with "the diet of outworn clichés" is to make them new. "In our language what we call slang, in our music what we call jazz, and in almost all what we call fiction, this destructive-constructive improvising is the key."<sup>13</sup>

The hero of *Love Among the Cannibals*, Earl Horter, faces all the problems defined by Morris. He realizes that he has to transform the artificiality surrounding him into something genuine. In his profession as a writer of popular lyrics he sees the necessity to give a fresh twist to the clichés he uses. This is seen as a continual process in the book as Horter woos his girl in words, teases Mac and taunts Billie by crooning snatches of song which he composes as he goes along. He realizes that the cliché has encroached upon his life also: his reactions and thought processes. In the process of transforming the clichés in his life he sees that the "first problem, surgically speaking, is to remove

<sup>10</sup> Wright Morris, "Made in U.S.A.," p. 483.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 488.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 491.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 494.

from the subject the encrusted cliché." <sup>14</sup> Horter sees the need to strip both spiritually and materially to the essentials. The process of "stripping" to the essentials and the process of "becoming" anew is conveyed through a variety of symbols, the most obvious one being Horter's flashy car which is "stripped" (by the Mexicans) of all its "inessential" accessories during the night and is reassembled and wheeled onto the road to start a new run for life.

If the clichés of life preoccupy Morris in *Love Among the Cannibals*, he is in no less a degree concerned with the clichés of language. He deals with the clichés of language very successfully. The jargon of Hollywood is presented to us straight, but the context reveals very clearly the grotesqueness of the "lingo," and at the same time it raises a laugh from us because of the delightful twist of irony which Morris gives to the faded jargon.

"What a writer does, not what he should do . . . is the only imaginative fact of any consequence." <sup>15</sup> Although Morris has held himself aloof from social problems and the imbroglio of controversy, of all the writers on the current literary scene he alone seems to have primarily addressed himself to defining the country, its "inhabitants," and the collective American experience. His concern has always been with that which is uniquely American. Morris' characters, many of whom are Nebraskans in the early novels, are representative Americans. Their character traits are used to illustrate problems individual to them and native to their country. The portrayal of such uniquely American characters is reinforced by the style of writing which is the seismograph of the nuances of human speech. Through the constant backlooks of his characters, Morris has also helped define the collective American experience. Especially in the novels which explore one or more aspects of the influence of the past, Morris records for us the gradual shift in traditions and ways of living which in turn reflect the cultural evolution of his country. His most ambitious book in this respect is *The Works of Love*, in which Morris tries to encompass within the life story of one man the transformation of a society from a rural to a predominantly

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 487

<sup>15</sup> Wright Morris, "Letter to a Young Critic", p. 98.

urban one. A specific and important extension of the exploration of the American experience is Morris' probing into the past, its perils and its meaning for the present. The past, present, and future are all Morris' concern. His sense of the past is the converse of nostalgia because he "wants out": his aim is to "possess" the past in order to live vitally in the present and so prepare for the future. His *characters* turn toward the past as an escape from a present which is sterile. But Morris' refuge from the aridity of the present is not the past, because that way lies danger. The recoil from the present must be into the future. The element of despair at the present is not allowed to overwhelm the sensibility: Morris has the ability to live with what he knows. The early novels held out a variety of tentative solutions to a reality beyond the present. But, latterly, Morris has shown an increasing tendency to look for solution in the creative spirit and the imagination of man. This stress on the transforming power of the imagination is pervasive in *The Field of Vision* and the novels which come after. The trust in the salvation which the imagination holds for man is so great that the disaster which Morris foresees for the world is not extinction by the bomb, but a future without consciousness, of a world which may dispense with art. His anxiety centres on the need to preserve man as a fully sentient being. In this fashion, Morris, the supremely conscious artist, is able to anticipate the future inasmuch as he evokes and incorporates the past. Major craftsman that he is, Morris is not content to indulge in the past. He conceptualizes it. Through this act of objectification, he is able to "rip the veil" of nostalgia and "walk through the rent" into the future.

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N. V. S.





# THE MORAL VISION OF ARTHUR MILLER

DARSHAN SINGH MAINI

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WHAT SPURS a person into song or story is a question which admits of no facile answer, for it involves, among other things, problems of aesthetics, semantics, and psychology. No single theory or formulation can hope to account for the seminal impulse and the resultant creative process. Whether it's the Yeatsian "lust and rage," or "an inner chaos crying for order,"<sup>1</sup> or some trauma that ignites the artistic potential may be easy to determine in a particular case; what is really difficult is to explain the alchemy of art whereby a thing conceived in the dark issues forth into the noon-day of light and claims significance. I am not concerned here with the dialectics of creativity, nor even with the architectonics of art; they are only relevant here in so far as Arthur Miller is a writer in whom the bridge between what Kierkegaard calls "the first sphere" of existence (aesthetic) and the second (ethical) is traversed almost instantaneously, if not simultaneously with the act of creation. The immediacy and the externality here are subsumed in a moral vision springing to life through instant choice and decision. The time-lag, if any, is so brief as to seem to suggest the reversal of the "spheres." That is to say, in Miller the nuclear explosion appears "ethical" rather than "aesthetic," such being the moral energy of his plays. I think, the point will become clearer if we compare him with writers like Henry James or Joseph Conrad who too are intimately concerned with the questions of choice and

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Miller, *Collected Plays* (Viking, 1963), Introduction, p. 38.

commitment, action and consequence. Whereas they warm up to the ethical centre in their stories through levels of awareness painfully arrived at and crossed, Arthur Miller brings things to the boil instantly, not only because a playwright, unlike a novelist, has no space for extended dramatics, but because the primary cause in him will brook no delay. Or, to put it differently, whereas for a James the creative exercise may begin in "delight" and end in cognition, if not "wisdom," for Miller it inevitably begins in disturbance and debate whether it lead to any solution or not. There is no room here for the play of the imagination *qua* imagination, and the work is never an aesthetic artifact, sovereign and sufficient. In fact, Miller may well have voiced the well-known Shavian sentiment that, as for pure art, he would not have bothered to put pen to paper.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say he takes little interest in the aesthetics of the drama; on the contrary, he is a highly conscious experimentalist keenly responsive to the technical challenges offered by the theme in hand. Only he does not hoist the show because "the play's the thing," and the carnival must not stop. If the drama of the moral choices which he enacts in play after play needed the medium of the drama as such for its complete vindication, then the coalescence was not a marriage of convenience but of ethical necessity.

I view Arthur Miller, then, as a traditional moralist in Anglo-American tradition who harks back to Puritanism on the one hand, to Hebraism<sup>2</sup> on the other. Of course, both these are covert presences in Miller who, as it were, has imbibed their essence without losing his artistic integrity and flexibility. It's as if the sterner stuff had filtered through and become mellow, gaining both in flavour and richness. But essentially, the angry Puritan abides, and the stern Hebrew hides in the wings. I am tempted to regard him in the Hawthorne-Melville line, though for obvious reasons, it's best to treat him as a non-conformist in the tradition of Hampden, Paine and, oddly enough, even

<sup>2</sup> Miller's Jewishness is more a matter of tone and stance than of insistence and application, except of course in *Incident at Vichy*, where the Jewish exclusiveness is amongst other things related to the Jewish "femininity," inviting rape and terror and destruction.

*The Moral Vision of Arthur Miller*

George Orwell.<sup>3</sup> It's not the "heart of darkness" in man which impels him so much (though *The Crucible* in particular seems to point in that direction) as the heart of darkness which society symbolises from age to age. There has always been a type of mind in Anglo-American literature which is quick to take offence at the slightest hint of social iniquity. It's a mind that bristles up to a condition of combat the moment it sniffs an affront to itself or to essential human dignity. Passion for justice is its distinctive or characteristic mark. What's more, it is reinforced by the courage of the lonely heart that brushes aside all considerations save those which are its own imperatives. Arthur Miller belongs here if he belongs anywhere. His ancestry is more a question of ethical affinity than of race or religion or country as such. If his themes are American, it's only because he happens to be an American; otherwise the theatre of the mind he projects is the theatre of mankind.

I think Dennis Welland is on the whole right when he suggests Miller's growing up during the Depression in America as the most important factor in determining his work. It was, as he puts it "the Depression that gave him his compassionate understanding of the insecurity of man in modern industrial civilisation, his deep-rooted belief in social responsibility, and the moral earnestness that has occasioned unsympathetic—and often unjust—criticism in the age of the Affluent Society".<sup>4</sup> A tender and nostalgic play like *A Memory of Two Mondays*, an autobiographical work conceived in love and pathos, bears ample testimony to this view. But it must not be forgotten that Miller's primary impulses are purely ethical as in Wordsworth, and the Depression helped reinforce and organise his reactions much in the same way as the French Revolution did in the case of the Lake poet. There is, I suggest, something archetypal about a sensibility like Arthur Miller's. Without ever losing his fundamental humanistic faith in the potentialities of man, Miller, nevertheless, conceives society as an imperfect though ineluctable necessity, something which will always remain flawed, inviting agonising reappraisals. This unsleeping concern with the moral

<sup>3</sup> There are, of course, marked differences between the politics of Arthur Miller and those of George Orwell.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Welland, *Arthur Miller* (London, 1964), pp. 6-7.

health of man is basic to his art.

As I have said earlier, Arthur Miller is a highly conscious artist and has, unlike some other major dramatists of the world, a well-considered view, if not theory, of the drama. His ideas expounded in several critical essays, above all in the Introduction to his *Collected Plays* (Viking Press, 1957), add up to a fairly coherent if passionate statement, and it's best to study his work in the light of these pondered points not because other criteria are irrelevant, but because a committed writer as gifted as Miller could scarcely be examined with profit without keeping in mind the avowed purposes of his craft. It is not my intention here to attempt an analysis of his work as it relates to his dramatic credo; all that I wish to do is to highlight the visionary quality of his plays and the intensity of his moral passion. Considered thus, one may view his drama as rage. There are, of course, high-voltage scenes in O'Neill and Tennessee Williams which turn upon raw, stark and primeval emotions, but the explosion there is of an elemental nature. The tyranny of lusts is dramatised in frames of compelling power and poetry. However, such is the shattering quality of these charged scenes that the moral centre tends to get out of focus. For the moment, passion is all and it overwhelms. In Arthur Miller, on the other hand, the passions are severely chained to ethical choices as, for instance, in *A View from the Bridge*, and they have no amoral, autonomous existence as such. "From this," says Miller, "flows the necessity for scenes of high and open emotion."<sup>5</sup>

Since all his major plays except perhaps *A View from the Bridge* are almost overtly political, it is often believed that Arthur Miller's primary imagination is political too. This impression appears to be reinforced by some of his own statements outside the theatre, as also by his courageous and sustained association with liberal and just causes both in the United States and outside. It is, I believe, easy to see that Miller is hardly interested in politics *per se*. The entire business of elections, governments, even ideologies and doctrines, is not his immediate concern. That is to say, he is not roused to indignation because of the shortfalls in political expectations. Nor, I trust, does he seek any-

<sup>5</sup> *Collected Plays*, Introduction, p. 7.

where in his work to suggest a blueprint of his political utopia. I would even suggest the presence of a distinct "pastoral" patch in Miller, a kind of nostalgic regression from the obtrusive and subversive nature of contemporary politics to the innocence and freedom of uncovenanted but purposive life. This takes the form of muted poetry in his plays, and is linked with his firm faith in the uniqueness and integrity of one's personal vision, and its dramatic viability on the stage. Talking of *A Memory of Two Mondays*, he refers among other things, to "the need for a little poetry in life"<sup>6</sup> expressed in that play. This need apparently is the harassed man's quest for beauty and stillness in a world taken up with lucre and grime and stink.<sup>7</sup> Miller's preoccupation with politics, therefore, is at bottom a contemporary necessity. "In our time," as Thomas Mann observes, "the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms." Even the existential problems of life today find a more apt dramatisation in the theatre of politics, for it provides the extreme situations needed to bring home man's creature loneliness or alienation in an inexplicable world. There is, of course, a point where the political imagination becomes ethical—all great politics rest on some dream—but in Miller's case, it is basically an ethical imagination which finds in the world of contemporary politics an operational area suited to its aesthetic fulfilment. Or, to put it differently, the socio-political reality impinges with such force upon his imagination as to demand at once an ethical answer. There is, as in *The Crucible*, a virtual coalescence of the two imaginations.

The question of public issues and private conscience is, in fact, the heart of the matter in Arthur Miller. In some form or other, it is repeated almost in each play or story. In his first important play, *All My Sons*, Joe Keller's dastardly anti-social act of selling defective cylinder-heads to the Air Force during the War—a compulsion forced upon him as much by the irrational laws of a "jungle" economy as by his own moral vulnerability—leads to a terrible crisis of conscience in Chris, his

<sup>6</sup> *Collected Plays*, Introduction, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> I think it would not be too fanciful to imagine that the constant use of the toilet in *A Memory of Two Mondays* has a symbolic significance.

younger son, when he realises the full horror of "the tainted money," and the unreality and fakement of his own existence. The sheer brittleness of bourgeois ethics may be gauged from the pugilistic idiom of Joe Keller. "I am in business and they knock you out in five minutes."<sup>8</sup> In reality, this is the pathetic cry of a small man blown about by forces beyond his ken and control, a cry which reverberates like a tragic gong in the bemused consciousness of another small man, Willy Loman, whose idiom, when he is describing his earlier successes—"... knocked 'em cold in Providence, slaughtered 'em in Boston"<sup>9</sup>—too is the gangster-bully idiom of the underworld. If his father's crime creates a moral revulsion in Chris, and can only be dramatically vindicated in Joe Keller's suicide, or if Biff too must drive Willy Loman to his appointed doom because he will not put up with over-size, fake and phoney dreams of his trapped and isolated father, the nature of tragedy in Miller becomes transparent. The seeds of father-son clash lie not in the primeval, archetypal confrontation such as we find in Howard Spring's novel, *My Son, My Son!* or in Hugh Walpole's *Fortitude*, or in Rex Warner's *Men of Stones*, but in the anomalous conditions of a fiercely competitive and rapacious economy. In other words, the tragic breakdown here is the consequence of an inner failing which in its turn is effected largely by economic forces. The public issues impinging on individual consciences have, so to speak, thrown filial relations out of gear, and put instinctive loyalties and pieties to a severe moral test. In Miller's drama, such a test constitutes the dramatic centre, whatever the nature of the clash.

Perhaps in no other play of Miller's is the issue of conscience so powerfully dramatised as in *The Crucible*.<sup>2</sup> The five constituents of the tragedy—individual, family, society, church and state—are so interlocked in a grim, relentless struggle that the criss-cross of conflicting loyalties presents a most challenging test of the protagonist's moral fibre. And it's in the quality of his defiance that the greatness of the tragedy lies. "Tragedy," as D. H. Lawrence affirmed, "ought to be a kick at misery."<sup>10</sup> John Proctor's splendid and awesome fight against the theocratic

<sup>8</sup> *All My Sons, Collected Plays*, p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> *Death of a Salesman* (Penguin), p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Lawrence Lerner in *Shakespearean Tragedy*.

charlatanry and deviltry or McCarthyism of his day is above all a testimony of the authenticity of the individual conscience. He dies on the scaffold, but in so doing he vindicates not only himself but also the spirit of man. It is not as if he is a unique person, a small-time Christ;<sup>11</sup> on the contrary, he is an unhappy adulterer whose conscience is fully engaged only when he finds the whole fabric of his life imperilled by atavistic impulses masquerading as authority. For a moment, his spirit quails—so does the spirit of Shaw's Joan or of Eliot's Becket—but the irrepressible and imperishable voice of truth which resides not only in flawed saints but even in ordinary, decent mortals finally will not be denied. And it's this transformation of ordinary human clay into something like granite which gives *The Crucible* a majestic tragic sweep in the end. Such a transformation is not wholly realised in terms of drama in *All My Sons* even though Joe Keller's consciousness expands to include all the sons of man in the ambit of his sympathies. Nor is Willy Loman's transformation clearly effected, though there can be no doubt about the metabolic and chemical changes taking place in his agonised psyche before his inevitable suicide. John Proctor in this respect stands unique amongst Miller's creations, not because of any inherent superiority but because of the intensity of his moral response. He found the moment of choice when "action was uniquely his own."<sup>12</sup>

*The Crucible* is in several ways a significant watershed in the spiritual growth of Arthur Miller himself.<sup>13</sup> Indictment of bourgeois ethics or capitalistic economy as an intellectual exercise was something that was not quite subversive or even revolutionary in the decades following the Depression. But indictment and exposure of McCarthyism even in an allegorical form required in the mid-fifties a rare integrity that was more than a question of the solar plexus. It involved his *raison d'être* as writer and as man. He could not have abdicated his office without losing that moral vision which had all along sustained him. In *The*

<sup>11</sup> Miller, I think, is always at pains to emphasize the limits of human virtue. In Joe Keller's plea, "A man cannot be a Jesus in this world" (*All My Sons*, p. 125), is a plain recognition of this fact though it appears to be an act of rationalization on the part of a fallen protagonist.

<sup>12</sup> *After the Fall*, publisher's blurb.



*Crucible*, thus, are collected nearly all the strains that go to make the moral tapestry of his work. These include beside the inflammability of conscience in the face of challenge, the horror of "handing over conscience to another,"<sup>13</sup> the viability of individual truth as against the "legality" of a massed lie, the choice between the principle of life's sanctity at all costs and the sanctity of the principle that sanctions and upholds life, the question of deed and consequence, and above all the distinction between the social law and ultimate law. What particularly disturbed Miller was the craven concern for creature life amongst the intellectuals who were prepared not only to wink at the monstrosities perpetuated against their liberal friends and colleagues but also to "testify" their "pink" past.<sup>14</sup> It was this peep into the "darkest Africa of our society"<sup>15</sup> as also of human life that brought him, as never before, face to face with evil as an ineluctable part of the human reality or situation, and the need to fight this evil to the last ounce of one's energies.

How to establish one's innocence in an atmosphere fouled and vitiated beyond redemption thus becomes a major issue in Miller. The truth, he seems to suggest like Orwell, though for significantly different reasons, is not statistical. This is not to say that Miller regards it as essentially subjective, i.e., something which originates in a sealed mind regardless of objective reality. Only the lonely truth of a Proctor is infinitely dearer than the warped truth of a hundred Danforths. Also, whereas innocence takes its own time to prove its credentials, it is in the nature of evil to spread fast and hold its sway.

True, Miller has no metaphysical interest in evil as such; nor does he usually regard it as a fundamental or basic fact of life;<sup>16</sup> but in *The Crucible*, as also in his subsequent plays, *A View from the Bridge*, *After the Fall*, and *Incident at Vichy*, he appears to take evil as a much more active condition of life than he was prepared to regard it till then. In any case, he finds, despite his humanist faith in man's potentialities, an element of

<sup>13</sup> *Collected Plays*, Introduction, p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> In *After the Fall*, the suicide of Lou is directly related to such a betrayal and abdication of one's conscience.

<sup>15</sup> *Collected Plays*, Introduction, p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

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the absurd and the irrational which no social or economic system can quite account for. As Louis Broussard puts it, "If Arthur Miller's conclusion in despair offers any kind of compromise, it lies in his division of the blame between man himself and society."<sup>17</sup>

As for the sanctity of human life, there could be no doubt about Miller's concern in the matter. (As a writer alive to the beauty and poetry of creature existence, he could not but salute the miracle of creation. In fact, there is a strong nostalgia for the felicities of life in almost all his plays, and in a story like *The Misfits*, we find a tender and lyrical regard for the animals driven to distraction by the predatory man. But in Miller's world-view, there is no room for life on sufferance or in abeyance, or for life purchased under duress or in surrender. Such a life is but a travesty and a lie, and can only exist as some kind of a proxy, and a fake. Once the moral edge is gone, or even blunted, the sheer act of physical survival is viewed as something peculiarly loathsome. A person who has ratted on a friend, a colleague or a compatriot "belongs in the sewer,"<sup>18</sup> to use Katherine's expression about Eddie Carbone in *A View from the Bridge*. Or, as Lou tells Quentin in *After the Fall*, "because if everyone broke faith there would be no civilization."<sup>19</sup> The entire work of Miller is full of ghastly betrayals, broken faiths, fractured loyalties and diminished relationships. Hale's passionate plea with Elizabeth to intercede with her husband: "... Life, woman, life is God's most precious gift; no principle however glorious, may justify the taking of it"<sup>20</sup> is countered by her thus: "He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him."<sup>21</sup> In a tragic scene which is almost Shakespearean in the quality of its spiritual appeal and moral beauty, we witness the apotheosis of the spirit of man as Proctor, dirty, bearded and manacled, towering over his pitiless accusers and traducers is finally saved from bartering away his soul. A cold fury grips him, and, though beaten, he could not be bent. As Elizabeth

<sup>17</sup> Louis Broussard, *American Drama* (Norman, Oklahoma), p. 120.

<sup>18</sup> *A View from the Bridge*, *Collected Plays*, p. 436.

<sup>19</sup> *After the Fall*, p. 48.

<sup>20</sup> *The Crucible*, *Collected Plays*, p. 320.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

in terror and tears rushes into his arms, he cries: ". . . Give them no tear! Tears pleasure them! Show honour now, show a stony heart and sink them with it."<sup>22</sup> The lines inevitably remind one of Lear's words to Cordelia, when both are taken prisoner:

"Wipe thine eyes;  
The good years shall devour them, flesh and fell,  
Ere they shall make us weep: We'll see 'em starv'd  
first."<sup>23</sup>

Miller's hero is an ordinary "sinner"<sup>24</sup> redeemed in the end by his creature integrity. For there is no greater crime in the Miller world than the abdication of one's identity, one's name, one's truth and one's responsibility.

[The question of sex and sin is viewed by Miller in a more humane and understanding manner than some of his critics imagine.<sup>25</sup> Though both Willy Loman and John Proctor are guilty of marital infidelity, they do not lose our respect, for their lapses are taken more as the lapses of blood than of will or choice. Of course in Miller all transgressions are fraught with pain and suffering whether they spring from immediacy or intention. Like George Eliot or even Conrad, he seems to believe that action and consequence cannot be separated, that the past cannot be wiped out for all your cunning and sophistry and acquired piety. But it is the anti-social act such as Joe Keller's that rouses the Puritan in him rather than sexual misconduct as such, however much he may view it with distaste. Of course, when sex becomes an anti-social and disruptive force as in *A View from the Bridge*, it is regarded with considerable alarm, but even there, it's never quite divorced from pity and poetry. There is nothing of the pundit and the padre about Miller. In fact, there is always an active feeling for these victims of passion. Even Eddie Carbone, whose smouldering, subterranean lust for his wife's young niece, Katherine, explodes into violence and rage leading to the betrayal of the "submarines," compels in the end

<sup>22</sup> *The Crucible*, p. 328.

<sup>23</sup> *King Lear* (Arden Edition, 1961), p. 201.

<sup>24</sup> *The Crucible, Collected Plays*, p. 239.

<sup>25</sup> Dennis Welland, *Arthur Miller*, pp. 116-17.

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a grudging admiration not only for the integrity of his concern for the "name," but, more importantly, for the integrity of his passion. It is the truth and authenticity of his response which humanises an otherwise ugly and desperate betrayer. His inconsolable heart, too, has its own imperatives which will not be denied. It is the presence of this element which makes it "finally possible to mourn this man."<sup>26</sup> Sex has, of course, an ennobling and sweetening effect in Miller, when, as in *The Misfits*, it graduates to love and understanding. Roslyn has what Guido calls "the gift of life,"<sup>27</sup> and she transforms such "misfits" as Perce and Gay through the healing touch of her womanly warmth.

In a great writer, theme and technique are integrally related to his central vision. In Miller's case, such a nexus has a peculiarly organic character. His Realism and his Expressionism seem to run counter to each other as approaches to reality though, in fact, both are pressed into service to explore and intensify his ethical themes. Whereas his Realism is a clear-eyed and even-handed treatment of the historical and contemporary ethos, his Expressionism is, apart from its psychological appeal and verisimilitude, a means of reiterating aesthetically his faith in the viability of individual truth.

Miller's entire work may finally be summed up as an attack on what he calls "the fortress of unrelatedness."<sup>28</sup> He is a forger of links and bridges at all levels of existence. For him, the drama is "an instrument to open up relations between a man and men, and between men and man."<sup>29</sup> He is seldom bothered about God, who is strikingly absent from his work as such. Of course, John Proctor's anguished cry, "I say . . . I say, God is dead,"<sup>30</sup> uttered in a moment of extreme frustration, does not imply either Proctor's or Miller's rejection of Divinity; only Miller is not in any theological sense interested in this phenomenon. For him, what's really more authentic is the humanity rather than the divinity of man. If there is God, He can only manifest Himself through the moral beauty of man.

<sup>26</sup> *Collected Plays*, Introduction, p. 52.

<sup>27</sup> *The Misfits*, p. 60.

<sup>28</sup> *Collected Plays*, Introduction, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>30</sup> *Collected Plays*, *The Crucible*, p. 311.

I think it should be easy to see that Arthur Miller is not sold on any single view, doctrine or creed unless of course humanism, which informs all his work, were to be treated as something doctrinaire. His "Marxism" too is simply an endorsement of the humanistic dream that has inspired socialist thought down the ages. He does seem to accept the Marxist view of the "super-structure" being conditioned by economy, and the turning of man to "commodity" in a competitive society, particularly in the earlier plays. However, in a very central sense, he is not a Marxist. His insistence on the validity of the personal and private truth as against conformity, his acceptance of evil as a fact of existence and as something rooted in the nature of man, and his increasing concern with the imponderables of life in his later work appear to suggest other directions. Whatever road he may elect to follow, it remains clear enough that his humanism will abide, that his moral vision will remain in constant attendance, that his integrity or courage will not falter. His entire attitude may indeed be summed up in the Revivalist hymn quoted by George Orwell in one of his essays:

Dare to be a Daniel,  
 Dare to stand alone,  
 Dare to have a purpose firm,  
 Dare to make it known.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Selected Essays* (Penguin), p. 160.

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# III

## THE CONTEXT OF TEXTS

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## THE QUESTION OF FORM IN THOREAU'S *A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS*

V. K. CHARI

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EARLIER CRITICISM of Thoreau's *Week* was prone to think that the work was not an artistic composition, and that Thoreau, though a master of the paragraph, was incapable of building unified wholes; and, as the basic materials for the book came from his Journal notes, what resulted from his attempt to put together these separate "nuggets" was an odd assortment of descriptions, penseses, and quotations strung upon a slender narrative thread, with no irreversible order and no architectural shape. Some recent critics, notably Carl F. Hovde<sup>1</sup> and Sherman Paul,<sup>2</sup> have tried to dispel this "plaster and broken bricks" (Lowell's phrase) theory of the book and argued that it is a carefully wrought work of art. Carl Hovde <sup>has examined</sup> studies the manuscript drafts of the book and by comparing them with the finished version shows that Thoreau had tried with painstaking craftsmanship to integrate a diverse assortment of material. Working as he did on small building blocks (his "cubes of Pythagoras"), he strove through successive revisions to combine them into larger compositions according to some principle or principles of

<sup>1</sup> "The Writing of Henry D. Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*: A Study in Textual Materials and Techniques," Ph. D. Diss., Princeton University, 1956 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms).

<sup>2</sup> *The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration* (Urbana, 1958), pp. 191-233.



unity. Hovde finds this unifying principle in the "constant alternation between the physical world . . . and the world of the mind." The "interplay between the physical and mental worlds is deliberate with Thoreau."<sup>3</sup> Hovde also notices a number of recurrent themes and ideas in the book that form a pattern. Sherman Paul reads the meaning of the work as a symbolic voyage or a quest for being, and sees its structure as consisting in the "framework of days." Thoreau "used the day to organize the *Week* because it was the natural unit of his inspiration"<sup>4</sup> (as he used the seasons in *Walden*). "The river and the day—these symbols of time and of Thoreau's consciousness of time—provided him with a conceit for the *Week* . . . The river was not only this stream of consciousness, the continuity of experience, it was for Thoreau what the sea was for Melville: the only place for exploration left to the spiritual pioneer."<sup>5</sup> The *Week* is, thus, "not only an excursion in deed but in thought, and in it Thoreau created one of the finest examples of 'transcendental' form."<sup>6</sup>

Both Carl Hovde and Sherman Paul may be right in their interpretations. But whereas Paul is largely concerned with the symbolism of Thoreau's inward exploration, Hovde shows a greater recognition of the fact that there is in the book a large body of narrative-descriptive material that provides a factual context for the meditations. The story of the trip and the meditations, "weave into one another and each by its separate but complementary character reinforces the other."<sup>7</sup> But both Hovde and Paul alike overlook, in their enthusiastic defence of Thoreau, the many weak "joints" of the narrative; for, in integrating the dual themes of the physical and mental voyages, and in providing connections for the reflective passages, Thoreau does not always achieve unqualified success.<sup>8</sup> There are various

<sup>3</sup> Hovde, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Paul, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>7</sup> Hovde, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., Walter Harding, *A Thoreau Handbook* (New York, 1959) and William Drake, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," in *Thoreau: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Sherman Paul (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.,

materials in the book worked into it from Thoreau's journals that have but a contrived connection with the narrative account. At any rate, we must attempt a more balanced statement of the question that takes into consideration both the merits and the faults of the work.

In dealing with the total structure of *A Week* it must first of all be recognized that this is not a work of fiction, nor even a symbolic prose-poem, but basically a descriptive account of a week actually spent on the river. There is in it a solid portion of naturalistic interest—an interest in a minute inspection and recording of nature's works—that cannot be ignored. But this is not to say that Thoreau stays contented with mere recording; he must constantly draw moral and spiritual lessons from observed phenomena using them as parables of wisdom; he must see each natural fact in the light of a corresponding spiritual law. For him nature is valuable for its transcendental meanings and for the reflections it occasions in the contemplative onlooker. The fruits of a naturalist's observations are "new contemplations."<sup>9</sup> ". . . the Concord is a dead stream, but its scenery is the most suggestive to the contemplative voyager, and this day its water was fuller of reflections than our pages even."<sup>10</sup> Hence, habitually, Thoreau goes off from a description of a physical fact into interesting speculations—philosophical, historical, and even philological. But while the search for correspondences is Thoreau's major concern, it is also true that he views nature with the eye of a poet-naturalist, finding its manifestations beautiful and intrinsically interesting. This latter interest is what accounts for the great accuracy and veracity of his nature descriptions in the *Week*, as in *Walden*, as well as for some of their beautiful poetry. Besides, there is a definite geographical interest in Thoreau's description of the Concord-Merrimack valley (and of the ponds in *Walden*) which apart from its intrinsic interest as nature description must possess an intimate appeal to those who are acquainted with the geography

1962), pp. 63-70. Both Harding and Drake see the serious limitations of the *Week*.

<sup>9</sup> *Week on Concord* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1900), "Saturday," p. 20. All textual references are to this edition.

<sup>10</sup> "Sunday," p. 56.

of New England. At any rate, the descriptive-narrative interest should not be ignored in an attempt to give the book an exclusive symbolical interpretation. The nature descriptions and the account of the voyage on the rivers, though they often appear in the deep hues of contemplation, are still the back-bone of the work. At every resumption of the narrative after the reflective excursions we feel a sense of being carried forward in the narrative account—we follow Thoreau down the stream through the geography of the country, starting from the point of the launching out in "Saturday," through the changes of weather and the visible scene, and back again on the homeward voyage in "Friday."

Basically, then, there are two types of material in the *Week*: (1) the descriptive-narrative and (2) the reflective. The first variety forms the structural framework of the book and is primary in that the book purports to be an account of a week's voyage on the Concord and Merrimack rivers, and this account is obviously to be regarded as possessing an independent interest. The second type of material consists of a series of reflections which have to be in some way related to the account of the physical voyage. This, in fact, was Thoreau's artistic problem in the work—to establish a connection between the pen-sees and the described facts of the voyage. There were two ways in which this could be achieved: first, an observed fact may occasion, by association, certain meditations connected with it, or the object itself by its influence may induce in the observer a contemplative mood; second, a correspondence may be established between the physical and the mental, in which the physical event or fact suggests a transcendent meaning for the observer.

That Thoreau himself meant to observe, in all his nature writings, this distinction between nature description and the reflections occasioned by it, and that he prized faithfulness and objectivity in the recording of nature is indicated by his remarks on Goethe both in his Journal and in the text of the *Week* itself. In his Journal he praises Goethe's ability to give "an exact description of objects as they appear to him, and his genius is exhibited in the points he seizes upon and illustrates.

It is chiefly this trait which is to be prized in the book."<sup>11</sup> Again, of Goethe's *Italian Travels* he says in the *Week* that "he is satisfied with giving an exact description of things as they appear to him, and their effect upon him. . . . Even the few showers are faithfully recorded. He speaks as an unconcerned spectator, whose object is faithfully to describe what he sees, and that, for the most part, in the order in which he sees it. Even his reflections do not interfere with his descriptions."<sup>12</sup> Thoreau believed, with Emerson and Whitman, that "a true account of the actual is the rarest poetry, for common sense takes a hasty and superficial view."<sup>13</sup> It is, thus, Thoreau's respect for what he calls "the natural facts, or perennials, which are ever without date,"<sup>14</sup> and for the virtues of "good faith and directness" in the reporting of them (virtues that he praised in Alexander Henry's *Adventures*)<sup>15</sup> that accounts for the realism and immediacy of his own nature descriptions in the *Week*. Such are the descriptions of the Concord river valley with its shifting scenes, and also of the woods and ponds in *Walden*. Thoreau's interest in portraying the works of nature must, then, be viewed as an independent aesthetic end, and not merely as one designed to provide a context for his symbols, though the latter activity, too, is present as a parallel purpose.

Of the second type of material that may be roughly classified as reflective or speculative comments, there is a varied assortment of philosophical comment, history, anecdotes, poetic criticism, etc. Thoreau succeeds in establishing contexts for only some of these comments, whereas others seem to be outright interpolations, introduced by the author for no better purpose than, presumably, to bolster up the pages of his book. Thoreau himself seems aware of a certain amount of digressive material in his work and either apologizes for it or devises ingenious link sentences that might make the transitions seem less abrupt and arbitrary. But where he succeeds in integrating his material he does so by a strict observance of the laws of

<sup>11</sup> *Journal*, I, 15.

<sup>12</sup> "Thursday," pp. 329-30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>14</sup> "Tuesday," p. 219.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217-18.

association. That Thoreau himself understood this principle in writing his composition may be inferred from the following statement:

While we sailed fleetly before the wind, with the river gurgling under our stern, the thoughts of autumn coursed as steadily through our minds, and we observed less what was passing on the shore, than *the dateless associations* and impressions which the seasons awakened. . . <sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere in the book he speaks of the "fitting perspectives and demi-experiences of the life that is in nature."<sup>17</sup> The most beautiful reflective passages in the *Week* are those that are thus truly "awakened" by the sublimities of nature, and in which the nature observations are suffused with a meditative light. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

While one of us landed not far from this island to forage for provisions among the farm houses . . . the other, sitting in the boat which was moored to the shore, was left alone to his reflections.

If there is nothing new on the earth, still the traveller always has a resource in the skies. They are constantly turning a new page to view. The wind sets the types on this blue ground, and the inquiring may always read a new truth there. There are things there written with such fine and subtil tinctures, paler than the juice of lime, that to the diurnal eye they leave no trace, and only the chemistry of night reveals them. Every man's daylight firmament answers in his mind to the brightness of the vision in his starriest hour.<sup>18</sup>

Not only is the connection managed here most perfectly, but there is also achieved an exquisite fusion of observation and meditation, of the landscapes of the earth and the soul. Such is also the long ruminative passage in "Wednesday" inspired by

<sup>16</sup> "Friday," p. 353. (Italics mine.)

<sup>17</sup> "Concord River", p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> "Friday," p. 384.

the sublime vision of the sunset, leading to the poem on "The Inward Morning" and culminating in the following paragraph:

Whole weeks and months of my summer life slide away in thin volumes like mist and smoke, till at length, some warm morning, then perchance, I see a sheet of mist blown down the brook to the swamp, and I float as high above the fields with it. I can recall to mind the stillest summer hours, in which the grasshopper sings over the millions, and there is a valor in that time the bare memory of which is armor that can laugh at any blow of fortune. For our lifetime the strains of a harp are heard to swell and die alternately, and death is but "the pause when the blast is recollecting itself."<sup>19</sup>

Another passage of great contemplative sublimity is the "take-off" in "Monday" from the sound of the drum beats to reflections on time and eternity, on the harmonizing power of music, on the sense of communication achieved with the remote ages of the past through the mysterious power of sound, etc. The passage builds a consistent and unified impression and is nicely rounded off in the paragraph beginning:

Still the drum rolled on, and stirred our blood to fresh extravagance that night. The clarion sound and clang of corselet and buckler were heard from many a hamlet of the soul, and many a knight was arming for the fight behind the encamped stars.<sup>20</sup>

Of equally great beauty are some of the passages on the fish in "Saturday." In fact, the whole of this chapter produces a unified and even impression of the parallel streams of the river and the smooth-flowing current of meditation in the mind of the narrator. The naturalist's observations are interfused with meditations that are naturally induced by those observations. There is nothing jarring; the fusion of the two elements is quiet and unobtrusive. The whole experience of Saturday's voyage reaches

<sup>19</sup> "Wednesday," p. 298.

<sup>20</sup> See "Monday," p. 175.

its climax of subdued ecstasy at the end of the chapter when "nature's health or *sound state*" is made to coincide with the "health or sound state" of the spirit. Similarly effective are also the concluding paragraphs of "Friday", beginning:

But here on the stream of the Concord, where we have all the while been bodily, Nature, who is superior to all styles and ages, is now, with pensive face, composing her poem Autumn, with which no work of man will bear to be compared.

The reflections on the moon and the stars, on spiritual astronomy, and other related thoughts including the take-off on "Silence"—all merge quietly into the smooth flow of meditation and provide a fitting climax to Thoreau's account of his voyage.

While one way in which Thoreau tries to combine his materials is to interfuse thought with factual description, he also seeks to draw analogies or establish definite correspondences between the world of nature and the world of mind. Objects and facts of the world of outer experience are shown to possess a transcendent meaning to the inner world of the soul and correspond to its laws. Both these methods, no doubt, illustrate the same theme—the theme of spiritual regeneration through a union with the life of nature; but they are only different as to their modes.<sup>21</sup> The method of correspondence explores the symbolic extensions of an observed phenomenon. The most dominant of such symbols in the *Week* is the river and the voyage down its stream. Thoreau's treatment of his subject, like his treatment of the *Walden* pond, is accurate as to botany, zoology, and geography; but it is also invested with symbolic values. In the first chapter, by associating the Concord River with the great and historic rivers of the world, the Xanthus, the Nile, the Ganges, the Mississippi, and by speaking of its emblematic and timeless existence, Thoreau has transformed the physical stream into a symbolic conceit, and given the prospect of a launching out on its "bosom" the character of a spiritual voyage.<sup>21</sup> In the following passage from "Monday", Thoreau further develops the analogy between the flow of the river and the flow of human life:

<sup>21</sup> "Concord River," p. 8.

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We occasionally rested in the shade of a maple or willow, and drew forth a melon for our refreshment, while we contemplated at our leisure the lapse of the river and of human life; and as that current, with its floating twigs and leaves, so did all things pass in review before us, while far away in cities and marts on this very stream, the old routine was proceeding still. . . .<sup>22</sup>

In these lines, ~~it will be seen that~~ the image of the river acquires an added significance by symbolizing not only the lapse of human life, but also the movement of consciousness itself. The contemplation of the flow of the stream induces in the voyager a mystical sense of continuity and identity with all life and all ages: ". . . as men lived in Thebes, so do they live in Duns-table."<sup>23</sup> This sense of continuity and participation not only enables Thoreau to overcome the barriers of space and time, it seems to break down the obstacle of all matter and reduce all solid masses and structures into a state of solution undulating with the gentle current of the river of consciousness.

Thus we "sayled by thought and pleasure," as Chaucer says, and all things seemed with us to flow; the shore itself, and the distant cliffs, were dissolved by the undiluted air. The hardest material seemed to obey the same law with the most fluid, and so indeed in the long run it does. Trees were but rivers of sap and woody fibre, flowing from the atmosphere, and emptying into the earth by their trunks, as their roots flowed upward to the surface. And in the heavens there were rivers of stars, and milky ways, already beginning to gleam and ripple over our heads. There were rivers of rocks on the surface of the earth, and rivers of ore in its bowels, and our thoughts flowed and circulated, and this portion of time was but the current hour.<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere in the book, too, Thoreau emphasizes the same close correspondence between the river and the flow of conscious-

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>22</sup> "Monday," p. 119.

<sup>24</sup> "Thursday," p. 335.



ness: "... and we seemed to be embarked on the placid current of our dreams, floating from past to future as silently as one awakes to fresh morning or evening thoughts."<sup>25</sup>

There are various other correspondences suggested in the book, especially those that emphasize the ideas of purity and renewal, and organic connections between nature and art. For instance, the fish embody for the author "the fish principle" or the law of fertility in nature,<sup>26</sup> the self-replenishing fountain-head of the Merrimack suggests "the fountains of innocence and youth" that run close to the stream of life, in which one may replenish one's vital energies;<sup>27</sup> the beauty and poise of the bark sailing down the stream suggests a law for the conduct of life with equipoise and serenity. Nature also provides for the author the laws whereby man may best create art. These instances need not be multiplied. But they illustrate an important method by which Thoreau achieves in his work an integration of the nature descriptions with the reflections.

However, there are a large number of other passages containing sundry comments that are not, unfortunately, assimilated in this way into the current of the narrative. They do not seem to arise naturally from their contexts. It will be interesting to see how Thoreau manages to work such passages into the narrative by contriving connections in a rather ingenious manner. In the chapter "Sunday" he mentions the *Gazetteer* "which was our navigator, and from its bald natural facts we extracted the pleasures of poetry."<sup>28</sup> Then follows a full twenty-page discourse on books, poets, the nature of poetry, etc. Valuable as all this material is as a critical discussion, it has but the remotest connection to the narrative. When after the long digression the author resumes his account saying, "We thus worked our way up this river, gradually adjusting our thoughts to novelties . . .," we feel that the matter of the voyage had been all but forgotten; neither do we see much sense in his *thus*. There is another long digressive tract in "Monday"<sup>29</sup> where

<sup>25</sup> "Saturday," p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> "Tuesday," p. 192.

<sup>28</sup> "Sunday," p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> "Monday," p. 121 ff.

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from a mention of melons, "which are a fruit of the east," he launches off into the philosophies of the East, including a long extract from the *Bhagavad-Geeta*. As usual, again, he assumes the narrative thread with a link sentence, "While engaged in these reflections," etc. A little later in the chapter, he introduces another digression on Vishnu Sarma, Manu, and the Sanskrit scriptures, and on History and Biography, with the remarks: "Still the *noon* prevailed, and we turned the prow aside to bathe . . . still had India, and that *noon-tide* philosophy, the better part of our thoughts."<sup>30</sup> One would at once see that the passage from *noon* to *noon-tide* philosophy is rather a case of semantic quibble than a genuine connection. The link at the end of passage, "Thus did one voyager waking dream, while his companion slumbered on the bank," again, leaves us unconvinced, as we know that all this philosophical excursion could not have come as a reverie. Thoreau's method of making "wholes out of parts"—of putting together disconnected Journal notes—is very much in evidence here.

Sometimes, Thoreau even sheds the pretence of a "waking dream" and calls on Anacreon, Chaucer, or whom he will, to play the minstrel for him:

Here was that "pleasant harbor" which we had sighed for, where the weary voyageur could read the journal of some other sailor, whose bark had plowed, perchance, more famous and classic seas. At the table of the gods, after feasting follow music and song; we will recline now under these island trees, and for our minstrel call on

#### ANACREON<sup>31</sup>

Then follow six pages<sup>\*</sup> of commentary on the Greek minor poets. Equally unabashed is the insertion of passages on the satires of Persius in "Thursday" and the poetry of Chaucer in "Friday." At these points Thoreau seems to be straining his ingenuity to create a context for the passages. Here is the paragraph introducing Persius:

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>31</sup> "Tuesday," p. 225.

At a country inn, in this barren society of ostlers and travelers, I could undertake the writers of the silver or the brazen age with confidence. Almost the last regular service which I performed in the cause of literature was to read the works of

### AULUS PERSIUS FLACCUS<sup>32</sup>

By way of introducing the essay on Chaucer, Thoreau says, "This change in weather was favourable to our contemplative mood, and disposed us to dream . . . while we floated in imagination further down the stream of time to poets of a milder period," etc., and then chooses to talk about Chaucer.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the most notorious of all digressive passages in the book is the thirty-page tract on Friendship, which is clearly out of place in the narrative. Thoreau introduces the passage with the same sleight of ingenuity—which we can of course see through:

While we float here far from that tributary stream on whose *banks* our *friends* and *kindred* dwell, our thoughts, like the stars, come out of their horizon still; for there circulates a finer blood . . . the blood, not of kindred merely, but of *kindness*, whose pulse still beats at any distance and forever.<sup>34</sup>

From *banks* to *friends* and *kindred* (dwellers on the bank) to *kindness* or friendship—such is the movement of "our thoughts" which Thoreau says "come out of their horizon"—a very arbitrary movement, one must admit. Thoreau, we feel, should have known better than to plant a whole separate essay in the midst of the narrative. There are many more such instances in which Thoreau may be charged with violating the form of his composition. In a few cases, no doubt, Thoreau succeeds in providing for his comments adequate contexts. Such are some of the historical passages and anecdotes. The reflections on the wooded island in "Wednesday," leading to a quotation from Pindar and the meditations on nature's (geological) antiquity and man's

<sup>32</sup> "Thursday," p. 310.

<sup>33</sup> "Friday," p. 372.

<sup>34</sup> "Wednesday," p. 261.

(historical) antiquity<sup>35</sup> are examples of an exquisite connection. The historical excursion about Hannah Dustan in "Thursday"<sup>36</sup> reveals the mind of the author shuttling back and forth in time, spanning great intervals of history and emphasizing the unity and eternity of all experience, and of nature. But these successes, valuable as they are, are marred by the many serious lapses that have brought upon Thoreau the opprobrium of his critics.

The *Week* is, no doubt, a contemplative book, as Sherman Paul has insisted. Thoreau records both physical landscapes and the landscape of his own mind, both occasion and thought, and "makes each occasion yield its thought,"<sup>37</sup> its value to the contemplative observer. While we grant this, we should not at the same time minimize the importance of the descriptive-narrative, as Sherman Paul tends to do. There is, of course, no conflict between the descriptive and the contemplative interests; there is, on the other hand, a perfect balance of the two, as Paul himself recognizes.<sup>38</sup> Further, it may be seen that Thoreau's nature descriptions are not merely as occasion for meditation, but they are themselves a way in which he probes the mysterious life of nature and tries to capture its essence. It is this closeness of the observer to the surrounding life of nature that gives immediacy to the experience that Thoreau describes in the *Week* and *Walden*.

Both Hovde and Paul have claimed that the organization of the book around the basic units of the days of the week lends to the work of formal structure of a kind. But this claim cannot be sustained. The division into days is not rendered structurally or symbolically significant, for the individual days could be shifted around without any loss to the narrative. For example, Thoreau could have commenced his journey on a Friday and concluded it on a Saturday, and the reflections that arose in his mind on a Tuesday could very well have arisen on a Wednesday, and so on. As for the interpolated passages, they could have appeared anywhere in the book. The individual chapters do not also seem to possess the kind of thematic unity that

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>36</sup> "Thursday," p. 324 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Sherman Paul, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204-5

Sherman Paul finds in them. According to Paul, "Sunday," for example, is "built around morning or Sunday vocation"; "Monday" deals with the poet's "nooning or contemplative pleasures," etc.<sup>39</sup> This scheme offered by Paul shows overlapping and is imprecise. For one thing, it may be argued that the poet indulges in his "nooning" all along the way, and not in the "Monday" chapter alone. The rhythm of the dawn, the noon-tide, and the night is followed out on every day of the week and there are reflections aroused by these occasions and appropriate to them, which could not be shifted from their places. Even then, not all the reflections are found to be appropriate in this manner. For instance, not every thing that appears in "Sunday" may be justified as being relevant to Sunday vocation. However, the account of the voyage itself—the embarking, the progress down the stream, and the return, with the accompanying descriptions of the places along the route—follows an irreversible order. This order constitutes the real structure of the narrative, and gives it both continuity and unity. There is also an alternating rhythm, as observed by Hovde, produced by the interplay of the physical and mental worlds, which is structure of a kind, too. On the whole, perhaps, the work leaves a unified impression of Thoreau's contemplative voyage, though, once again, this is often marred by lengthy digressions. We have all through the work felt the presence of a mind that is intensely alive, of the awakened consciousness of Emerson's Man Thinking.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217-18.

## "MR. HIGGINBOTHAM'S CATASTROPHE" AN UNUSUAL HAWTHORNE STORY

R. N. MEHTA

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"MR. HIGGINBOTHAM'S CATASTROPHE" is not one of Hawthorne's best-known stories. This, though rather unfortunate, is understandable in that it is not, like "Young Goodman Brown," one of his profounder allegories on the ubiquity of evil, nor does it, drawing upon a mythical past, enact with the power and poetry of "My Kinsman Major Molineux" the experience of initiation and the ceremony of rejection. A perfect little piece in itself, it is not one of those "dark," "ambiguous," "ambivalent" stories on which modern criticism so delights to expend what Lionel Trilling, echoing T. S. Eliot, calls its "brilliant busyness."<sup>1</sup> Taking a cue as it were from Melville's now famous review of *Mosses from an Old Manse*, in which he identified and eloquently extolled in Hawthorne his "power of blackness," criticism of Hawthorne, as of other American writers, has tended to concentrate on such things as allegory, symbolism, ironies, and archetypes. Admittedly, the gains resulting from this stupendous critical activity have been considerable. The Hawthorne canon, for one thing, has been considerably enlarged, and newer and profounder significances have been seen in his novels as well as in a number of his short stories.

That, however, has not been the happy fate of "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe." It has not been elevated to any lofty

<sup>1</sup> Lionel Trilling, "Our Hawthorne," *The Partisan Review*, XXXI, 3 (1964), 336.

pedestal in critical esteem. Henry James in his monograph on Hawthorne, oddly enough, does not even mention it, although he notes with especial relish that "on the whole, Hawthorne's observation has a smile in it oftener than may at first appear."<sup>2</sup> Poe seems to have liked the story but gives it only a line in his review of *Twice-Told Tales*. "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," he says, is "vividly original and managed most dexterously."<sup>3</sup> Yvor Winters, who has little enthusiasm for Hawthorne's tales and sketches as a whole, dismisses it as lacking "meaning,"<sup>4</sup> while Mark Van Doren's critical biography of Hawthorne in *The American Men of Letters Series* makes only a passing reference to the story.<sup>5</sup> Such a severe neglect of the story seems unwarranted, not merely because the story in itself is eminently readable, but because it is one of the few Hawthorne stories over which the shadow of puritanical gloom hardly falls. True, in one or two places we feel that the puritanical world of superstitions and spirits lurks just round the corner and could be invoked with the slightest effort; and in another mood Hawthorne would almost certainly have brought it in. But in the sunny, daylight world of the story as we have it all such suggestions and possibilities evaporate. Hawthorne, describing his own feeling about *Twice-Told Tales*, observes:

They have the pale tint of flowers that blossomed in too retired a shade—the coolness of a meditative habit which diffuses itself through the feeling and observation of every sketch. . . . The book if you would see anything in it, requires to be read in the clear brown, twilight atmosphere in which it was written; if opened in the sunshine, it is apt to look exceedingly like a volume of blank pages.<sup>6</sup>

"Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," however, is not the kind of

<sup>2</sup> Henry James, "Hawthorne", in *The Shock of Recognition*, ed., Edmund Wilson (New York: The Modern Library, 1943), p. 472.

<sup>3</sup> Edgar Allan Poe. "Hawthorne's Tales," *ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> Yvor Winters, *In Defense of Reason* (London, 1960), p. 157.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Van Doren, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (London, 1949), p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Twice-Told Tales and Other Short Stories* (Washington Square Press, 1960), pp. xiv-xv. References to "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe" are from the text as given in this edition.

story which, if opened in the sunshine, will shrivel up; nor will it look like a volume of blank pages. Its ebullience and fun, its zest and delightful abandon set it apart from its author's other creations. For, of the two or three of his other stories done in a lighter vein, the humour of "Mrs. Bullfrog" is rather heavy-handed, and the other two, "The Devil in Manuscript" and "The Seven Vagabonds," begin promisingly but soon shed their sprightliness.

"Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe" is the story of a Yankee pedlar, Dominicus Pike, who with his insatiable curiosity, inveterate instinct for gossip, and a dash of good luck comes off pretty comfortably from a scrape partly of his own making. The pedlar is of course the type of the Yankee, and we have a brisk little description of him in the opening paragraph:

He had a neat little cart, painted green, with a box of cigars depicted on each side panel, and an Indian chief, holding a pipe and a golden tobacco stalk, on the rear. The pedlar drove a smart little mare, and was a young man of excellent character, keen at a bargain, but none the worse liked by the Yankees, who, as I have heard them say, would rather be shaved by a sharp razor than a dull one.

Like another pedlar in literature—Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, who is also a "funny rogue"—Dominicus is popular with "the pretty girls along the Connecticut." On his way, one early morning, from Morristown to Parker's Falls, after having "travelled seven miles through a solitary piece of woods, without speaking a word to anybody but himself and his little gray mare," he is met by a man who "carried a bundle over his shoulder on the end of a stick." Asked about the latest news, the man whispers "in the ear of Dominicus, though he might have shouted aloud, and no other mortal would have heard him" that old Mr. Higginbotham of Kimballton was murdered at eight o'clock of the previous night by an Irishman and a Negro who strung him up the branch of a St. Michael's pear tree in his orchard. Dominicus is astonished not at the horrid nature of the communication so much as at the rapidity with which the news had travelled, for Kimballton was sixty miles away. "Ill



news flies fast," ruminates Dominicus, "but this beats railroads. The fellow ought to be hired to go express with the President's message." He solves the difficulty by supposing that the man had made a mistake of one day in the date of occurrence.

Dominicus carries the news to every tavern and country store along the road, adding a few details of his own to fill up the outline "till it became quite a respectable narrative." At the tavern where he is spending the night a few miles from Parker's Falls, everyone believes his news about Mr. Higginbotham, everyone except an elderly farmer who challenges him about the truth of the story:

"I tell the story as I heard it, mister," answered Dominicus, dropping his half-burned cigar. "I don't say that I saw the thing done. So I can't take my oath that he was murdered exactly in that way."

"But I can take mine," said the farmer, "that if Squire Higginbotham was murdered night before last, I drank a glass of bitters with his ghost this morning. Being a neighbor of mine, he called me into his store as I was riding by and treated me, and then asked me to do a little business for him on the road. He didn't seem to know any more about his own murder than I did."

"Why, then it can't be a fact!" exclaimed Dominicus Pike.

"I guess he'd have mentioned it if it was," said the old farmer.

Out on the road early next morning, Dominicus seeks confirmation of the murder from a stranger who too was carrying "a bundle over his shoulder on the end of a stick." The man, who turns out to be a Negro himself, stammers a reply to the pedlar: "No! no! There was no colored man! It was an Irishman that hanged him last night, at eight o'clock. I came away at seven! His folks can't have looked for him in the orchard yet." Though intrigued, Dominicus on second thought decides not to raise an alarm after the suspected accomplice. He soon arrives at Parker's Falls and sets the whole village agog with

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the news of Mr. Higginbotham's murder. The three cotton mills observe a holiday, the *Parker's Falls Gazette* "anticipated its regular day of publication" with the news of Mr. Higginbotham's murder in the headlines. The village poet "commemorated" the grief of Mr. Higginbotham's young niece in a ballad of seventeen stanzas. The selectmen even declared an award of five hundred dollars for the apprehension of the murderers.

But then the mail coach from the direction of Kimballton brings Mr. Higginbotham's lawyer and the niece, both of whom testify to having talked to him only a few hours earlier. The lawyer, in fact, produces a note signed by Mr. Higginbotham, "which irrefragably proved, either that this perverse Mr. Higginbotham was alive when he wrote it, or—as some deemed the more probable case of two doubtful ones—that he was so absorbed in worldly business as to continue to transact it even after his death." Dominicus is saved the indignity of being tarred and feathered by the intervention of the niece, and hastily leaves Parker's falls, but he decides to go now to Kimballton to find out the truth about this mystery. The toll-gatherer at the turnpike on the outskirts of Kimballton tells him that Mr. Higginbotham has just returned from Woodfield, and adds ominously: "I never saw a man look so yellow and thin as the squire does. . . . says I to myself, tonight he's more like a ghost or an old mummy than good flesh and blood." Dominicus goes into Kimballton, reaches the orchard in Mr. Higginbotham's wood lot as the village clock is tolling eight, and seeing something struggling beneath the branch of the pear tree, rushes forward and knocks down a sturdy Irishman standing there, and finds "not indeed hanging on the St. Michael's pear tree, but trembling beneath it, with a halter round his neck—the old, identical Mr. Higginbotham!" The latter takes the pedlar into high favour and sanctions his addresses to his pretty niece. Dominicus finally inherits the property.

The story is notable for a number of things. For one, the story as a story is remarkably well-told. It maintains right through a lively pace without sacrificing the smallest single detail. If one may still use the old-fashioned distinction between the narrative and the dramatic modes, it is clear that

Hawthorne is essentially a narrative artist. Not, of course, that he can't handle dialogue (to take only the most obvious expression of the dramatic mode of apprehension) effectively where necessary, but the instinctive direction of his genius seems to lie in the realm of the narrative mode. It may even be suggested that one of the reasons why he is always, and rather persistently, anxious to establish the distinction between "romance" and "novel" is perhaps to be found in this particular element in his natural endowment. He was a natural story-teller in the traditional folk manner.

The other thing to note is the consistently sprightly tone of the writing here. Hawthorne was always a master in the management, the almost faultless control, of the tone of his stories. A considerable part of the power of such stories as "Young Goodman Brown" and "My Kinsman Major Molineux" lies, in fact, in the complete rightness of their tone. But a story like "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe" suggests that, narrow though on the whole Hawthorne's range is, it is not nearly so narrow as is often believed. We have only to think of such widely different examples as "The Artist of the Beautiful," "Rappaccini's Daughter," "The Maypole of Merry Mount," "Young Goodman Brown," "My Kinsman Major Molineux" and "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe" to realize how richly varied are the effects he could produce by employing the appropriate tone, and how in each case the tone brings about the much-needed aesthetic distance between the writer and his material.

Even more important than the pace and the tone of the story, but not to be too rigidly distinguished from those elements, is its folklore quality. This finds expression here in at least two ways: through its folk humour, and, secondly, through its language, its use of the rhythms of folk speech. A delightful example of the peculiar, earthy, folk flavour of its humour is to be found in the exchange that takes place between the elderly farmer and the pedlar at the tavern. Another is in the description of the reaction of the people of Parker's Falls when the lawyer and the niece adduce evidence to prove that Mr. Higginbotham was alive a few hours earlier. But humour of the kind we have in this story is not something that can be located and pinned down to any one particular part

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of it. It permeates the whole story. From beginning to end the story is bathed in this humour, in this "comedic grace."<sup>7</sup> It is particularly important to stress this non-ironical aspect of Hawthorne's humour for we rarely think of him as a writer who is capable of such effects, though it must be conceded that the attention his use of irony (and allegory) has received is justified and even inevitable. The other expression of the folklore quality, namely in the rhythms of the prose of the story, is no less important. We generally think of Hawthorne as a careful, deliberate writer. His prose, whether in the novels or in most of the short stories, has a certain formality, a certain primness and even a self-consciousness about it which often reminds one of some of the best prose of the eighteenth century. Hawthorne's prose is so obviously "written". But in "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe" there is hardly a phrase that is not close to everyday folk speech. In one of the few fairly detailed discussions of the story, Daniel Hoffman calls it "the cider-tart speech of the go-ahead Yankee."<sup>8</sup> This element of colloquial, folk speech should again help us revise our customary notions about the narrowness of Hawthorne's range. It is clear that if he did not oftener make use of the tang of casual, colloquial speech in the way in which, for instance, Mark Twain did, that was because he did not choose to, not that he was incapable of doing so.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel G. Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (New York, 1961), p. 107.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.



## PASTEBOARD MASKS: A STUDY OF SYMBOLISM IN *PIERRE*

R. K. GUPTA

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ALTHOUGH MELVILLE rejected categorically many of the key assumptions and affirmations of the Transcendentalists, he accepted without reservation the Transcendentalist premise that all experience is symbolic.<sup>1</sup> By the time he wrote his mature fiction, he had come to believe that the function of the artist was to pierce beyond physical objects—the “pasteboard masks”—to underlying spiritual truths. In *Pierre*, Melville made highly effective use of symbols. But before some of the symbols in the novel are examined in detail, it must be insisted that in spite of all its symbolism, *Pierre* is by no means an allegory, as it is sometimes taken to be.<sup>2</sup> An allegory is a coherent structure in which all the elements are carefully integrated in a pattern of thought, and the systematizing process upon which the effectiveness of an allegorical scheme depends was not only alien but positively antithetical to Melville's mode of

<sup>1</sup> As F.O. Matthiessen points out in his *American Renaissance* (New York, 1941), p. 242, Melville's doctrine of “cunningly linked analogies” is closely akin to Emerson's proposition that “every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact.”

<sup>2</sup> For example, Lawrence Thompson in *Melville's Quarrel with God* (Princeton, 1952), pp. 247-294, interprets *Pierre* as a thinly veiled and consistently worked-out allegory of Melville's “quarrel with God,” while William Braswell in *Melville's Religious Thought* (New York, 1959), pp. 93-106, reduces the novel to an allegorical scheme in which different characters represent different faculties of the soul.

communication. Melville's technique had hardly anything in common with the allegorical method of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in which, as Miss Ethel-Mae Haave points out, "the characters are labelled, the goal of existence known, and the way to that goal charted."<sup>3</sup> In *Pierre* Melville speaks disparagingly of those who seek to systematize "eternally un-systematizable elements"<sup>4</sup>

In the second place, although, as Sedgwick says, Melville's characteristic symbols have "an almost endless capacity for taking different turns and weights of meaning,"<sup>5</sup> in *Pierre*, as in *Moby Dick*, Melville often indicated carefully the general range and direction of symbolic meaning for a particular act or object. In *Moby Dick* he specifically points out what the White Whale comes to symbolize for Ahab and for Ishmael, and in *Pierre* he brings out unambiguously the significance of many of the important symbols. Thus, the reversal on the wall by Pierre of the chair-portrait of his father is clearly established as being symbolic of his changed attitude toward him, just as Pierre's burning of the portrait is shown to symbolize his complete disavowal and rejection of his social heritage.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, fire is explicitly defined as the "eloquent symbol" of "ultimate Truth" (p. 306), and the catnip and the amaranth as symbols of "man's earthly household peace, and the ever-encroaching appetite for God" (p. 480). This is not to say that the symbolic significance of these various objects is exhausted by their explicit definitions, or that the symbols in *Pierre* can be so defined as to delimit precisely their range of meaning. On the other

<sup>3</sup> "Herman Melville's *Pierre*," (Unpub. diss., Yale, 1947), p. 249.

<sup>4</sup> *Pierre*: or *The Ambiguities* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., Evergreen Books, Grove Press Edition, 1957), p. 198. All subsequent references to *Pierre* will be to this edition and will be incorporated parenthetically in the text.

<sup>5</sup> William Ellery Sedgwick, *Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass., 1944), pp. 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> "Oh, symbol of thy reversed idea in my soul," Pierre apostrophizes the portrait of his father after having reversed it on the wall (p. 121), and after burning it, he exclaims: "Henceforth, cast out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and since the Future is one blank to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands untrammelledly his ever-present self!" (p. 277).

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hand, the explicit definitions provided by Melville do indicate the general direction of meaning for the symbols, and establish beyond doubt the fact, sometimes overlooked by Melville's symbolist critics, and well expressed by Miss Haave, that Melville's use of symbolism in *Pierre* is "an attempt to communicate and not to hide his central meaning."<sup>7</sup>

It is sometimes suggested that in *Pierre* Melville's symbolism shows a diminution of artistic skill. Barrett, for example, says that from the time of *Pierre* on, Melville's symbols "tend to become less poetic and more logical; sometimes they appear to be forced; sometimes they are melodramatic."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Richard Chase argues that the symbols in *Pierre* "tend to stand out clearly and statically and to have an intellectually associative relation to the whole work rather than an artistically achieved relation."<sup>9</sup>

This seems to be an arbitrary judgment, especially in view of the fact that two of Melville's most effectively and elaborately developed symbols—those of the Memnon Stone and the Enceladus—are to be found in *Pierre*. These two symbols are more organically integrated with the theme and texture of the novel in which they appear than any other symbol used by Melville, with the possible exception of the White Whale. The significance of these symbols is primarily thematic: they provide mythological parallels to the situation of the hero, and thereby serve a function similar to the one served by the allusions to *Hamlet* and to the *Inferno*. But because they not only provide thematic parallels for Pierre's situation but also define and clarify the course of his spiritual development (which, it may be pointed out, is the chief unifying thread in the novel), it may safely be claimed that these symbols have structural relevance too.

The Memnon symbol occurs between the two parts of Isabel's story. In a state of perturbed mystification, Pierre comes to "a remarkable stone, or rather, smoothed mass of rock" (p. 185) which, in his early youth, he himself had christened the Mem-

<sup>7</sup> Haave, p. 248.

<sup>8</sup> Laurence N. Barrett, "Fiery Hunt: A Study of Melville's Theories of the Artist" (Unpub. diss., Princeton, 1949), p. 146.

<sup>9</sup> *Herman Melville* (New York, 1949). p. 115.



non Stone. He crawls into its interstices and apostrophizes it. Later,

when placed in far different circumstances from those surrounding him at the Meadows, Pierre pondered on the stone, and his young thoughts concerning it, and later, his desperate act in crawling under it; then an immense significance came to him, and the long-past unconscious movements of his then youthful heart seemed now prophetic to him, and allegorically verified by the subsequent events (p. 190).

Melville is careful to bring out the latent significance of the symbolism of the Memnon Legend:

For Memnon was that dewy, royal boy, son of Aurora, and born king of Egypt, who, with enthusiastic rashness flinging himself on another's account into a rightful quarrel, fought hand to hand with his overmatch, and met his boyish and most dolorous death beneath the walls of Troy . . . . Herein lies an unsummed world of grief. For in this plaintive fable we find embodied the Hamletism of the antique world; the Hamletism of three thousand years ago: "The flower of virtue cropped by a too rare mischance" (pp. 190-91).

In three ways the Memnon Legend as presented by Melville provides thematic parallels for the novel. First, Melville interprets the Memnon Legend as a tragedy of impulsive and idealistic action, and this, obviously, his own novel is. Second, by equating Memnon with Hamlet, Melville introduces an aspect of the tragedy—"the flower of virtue cropped by a too rare mischance"—which is directly applicable to Pierre's situation. Third, Memnon's "enthusiastic rashness" in "flinging himself on another's account into a rightful quarrel" is symbolic of Pierre's defiant rejection of all his familial, social, and religious ties in order to pursue what he believed to be an ideal course of conduct. The symbol, then, far from being merely ornamental, elucidates the theme of the novel and contributes to the characterization of Pierre. Moreover, although Melville brings out several aspects of Memnon's tragedy, he does not make explicit

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equations between Pierre's situation and Memnon's. The parallels between their situations are left implicit and have to be imaginatively apprehended by the reader.

The Enceladus dream occurs toward the end of the novel. Enceladus, the son of incestuous Coelus and Terra, attempted to scale mountains and reach heaven. But his effort was frustrated, and in sheer defiance and desperation, he "turned his vast trunk into a battering-ram, and hurled his own arched-out ribs again, and yet again, against the invulnerable steep" (p. 482). In a state of trance, Pierre sees his own "duplicate face and features" (p. 482) superimposed on the figure of the Titan blindly hurling himself against the rocks.

The Enceladus dream is not only structurally relevant, but it is also important to the total meaning of the book and explicates and clarifies Pierre's tragedy. The Promethean defiance and the unquenchable idealism and aspiration of Pierre are symbolized by similar qualities in Enceladus, and the trammels of mortality which hold Pierre in check and frustrate his efforts are emblematically presented through the futility of the Titan's effort. With its overtones of incest, the Enceladus dream suggests also "the organic blended heavenliness and earthliness of Pierre," and his "mixed, uncertain, heaven-aspiring, but not wholly earth-emancipated mood" (p. 483). Like the earlier Memnon symbol, the vision of the Mount of Titans is a recapitulation of the central themes of the novel.

The symbols of the Memnon Stone and the Enceladus have structural significance also. By equating Pierre first with Memnon-Hamlet, and then with Enceladus, Melville shows, in symbolic terms, his hero's development from a youthful and impetuous idealism to a frustrated and desperate defiance. The dual equation illuminates a growth in Pierre's power of introspective self-analysis and thus throws light on his spiritual progression which is the basic structural element of the novel. The naive Pierre of the early part of the novel who believed his self-sacrificing conduct to be motivated by pure and idealistic considerations gradually becomes aware of the "terrestrial taint" (p. 483) subconsciously coloring those considerations, and this brings him to a realization of the complexity and ambiguity of moral and philosophical concepts.

Commenting on the Memnon and the Enceladus sections of *Pierre*, Ronald Mason says that in these passages the symbols "fleetingly . . . came under the giant control of a great poet and communicated in Titanic imagery conceptions almost too profound for expression."<sup>10</sup>

According to Sedgwick, the "main symbols" in *Pierre* "are felt as the coinages of Melville's mind."<sup>11</sup> This is true in the sense that many of the symbols in this novel do not (as many of the important symbols in *Moby Dick* do) seem to spring directly from Melville's experience, but are thought out by him. This is, however, not to say (as Sedgwick obviously implies) that the symbols in *Pierre* are clumsy or contrived. For example, no symbols in *Pierre* are more in the nature of "coinages" than those of the two portraits of Pierre's father and of Isabel's guitar. These symbols are somewhat like Zenobia's artificial flower (Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*) and Hester's scarlet letter, and there is a certain exotic, Hawthornesque quality about them. They are, however, far from being clumsy, and have not only great significance in their context but also a symbolic meaning which extends far beyond their immediate relevance to touch upon some of the basic ideas of the novel. The contrasting portraits of Pierre's father are clearly meant to suggest the duality of his character. But beyond this, they also suggest the duality inherent in human experience itself and in all moral and philosophical concepts. Similarly, the mysterious guitar is an apt emblem of Isabel's enigmatic qualities; it suggests the mystic and primitive nature of its dark-haired owner. It duplicates and enhances the mystery which surrounds the Pierre-Isabel relationship, and is, therefore, inseparable from its context. But it extends beyond its immediate context and symbolizes also the "everlasting elusiveness of Truth" (p. 472) which is an important theme in the novel. It is, from every point of view, a profoundly conceived and effectively worked-out symbol.

Thus, although the symbols in *Pierre* sometimes originate in the author's mind instead of coming directly from the rich ex-

<sup>10</sup> *The Spirit above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville* (London, 1951), p. 177.

<sup>11</sup> Sedgwick, p. 159.

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periences of life, they do not savor of fabrication or contrivance. They are appropriate as well as effective. And, of course, there is no dearth in *Pierre* of symbols which are derived from the world of nature—symbols such as those of the pine and the hemlock (p. 55), of the amaranth and the catnip (p. 480), and of the hill and the plain (p. 52). Some of Melville's favourite symbols—like those of the head and the heart (pp. 155, 234, 445), of fire (p. 306), and of the Titan (pp. 480-482)—recur in *Pierre*. Some symbols recur in a diffused and slightly altered form. For example, the qualities represented in *Moby Dick* by the sea-land antithesis are symbolized in *Pierre* by three different though related antitheses—those of the hill and the plain (p. 52), the cloud and the vale (p. 147), and the amaranth and the catnip (p. 480).

The technique of symbolism in *Pierre* is vastly superior to that in *Mardi* because, whereas in *Mardi* Melville deliberately sets out to embody general concepts in specific objects, in *Pierre* (as in *Moby Dick*) he endows ordinary objects and incidents with an intensity which raises them above mere particulars, and makes them, in Leon Howard's phrase, "luminous with suggestive implications."<sup>12</sup> In his best symbols in *Pierre*—in such symbols as those of the Memnon Stone and the Enceladus, of Isabel's guitar and the two portraits of Pierre's father—Melville starts with a concrete object and handles it in such a way as to make it suggest something beyond itself. The effect, both sought and attained by Melville in such symbols, is not merely that of apt representation, but of descriptive enhancement of the object represented.

It is by no means suggested that in *Pierre* symbolism is un-failingly effective. Some symbols are obviously not as successful as others. Occasionally, a symbol goes astray, has something crude about it. For example, the name "Steel, Flint, Asbestos" (p. 497) as symbolic of callousness of heart is merely trite and produces a sense of mechanical artifice. But an occasional failure does not counteract the great success with which Melville in *Pierre* expresses inner realities through physical objects. In one sense, the process of symbolization is more effective in

<sup>12</sup> Herman Melville (Berkeley, 1951), p. 177.

*Pierre* than in *Moby Dick*. In *Moby Dick*, Melville shows a tendency to load every fact and object with a symbolic significance, and this at times leads to confusion. In *Pierre* symbols are kept under control, with the result that in this novel symbolism does not lose its clarity and simplicity. E. L. Grant Watson is certainly justified in praising Melville for the "suggestiveness and perfection"<sup>13</sup> of his symbols in *Pierre*.

In *Pierre*, symbolism enabled Melville to express his ideas with a sharpness and urgency which cannot be achieved in an abstract statement. Originating from Melville's desire for more vigour and vividness than are attainable in a bare, scientific statement, symbolism in *Pierre* enlarges the stated meanings of words, and thereby enriches the emotional content of the novel and enhances its imaginative appeal to the reader.

<sup>13</sup> "Melville's *Pierre*," *New England Quarterly*, III (1930), 232.

## WHITMAN'S TWENTY-EIGHT BATHERS : A GUESSING GAME

O. K. NAMBIAR

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Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,  
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly  
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.

She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,  
She hides handsome and richly rest aft the blinds of  
the window.

Which of the young men does she like the best?  
Ah! the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.  
Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,  
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth  
bather,  
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.  
The beards of the young men glistened with wet, it ran from  
their long hair,  
Little streams pass'd all over their bodies.  
An unseen hand\* also pass'd over their bodies,  
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge  
to the sun, they do not ask who seizes fast to them,

They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and  
 bending arch,  
 They do not think whom they souse with spray.

## I

In *Walt Whitman Review* (December, 1961: Wayne University Press) there is an interesting article, "Stephen Crane and Whitman: A Possible Source for *Maggie*," by Professor Sholom J. Kahn. According to Professor Kahn, Whitman was a possible influence on Stephen Crane. There are no doubt certain parallels to be found in the prose and poetry of both Whitman and Stephen Crane—similarity in themes and attitudes. There are sharp differences as well. Professor Kahn makes a reference, among other things, to the well-known passage in *Song of Myself* where Whitman mentions the twenty-eight bathers. Kahn finds the same number twenty-eight mentioned in the scene in Chapter XIV of Crane's *Maggie*. The chapter begins with these words: "In a hilarious hall when there were twenty-eight tables and twenty-eight women and a crowd of smoking men . . .," and the number twenty-eight is emphasized by repetition as though it were in some way significant. Crane's use of the number twenty-eight reminds Professor Kahn of Whitman's twenty-eight bathers in section eleven of *Song of Myself*. He does not think it refers to the number of days in February, or in a woman's menstrual cycle. He does not wish "to join in the cabalistic game of seeking esoteric meaning in the number twenty-eight." He gives up the attempt. However, he finds these analogies close and curious, but believes that for some of Stephen Crane's inspiration—"and especially for that otherwise puzzling number twenty-eight, he went to that master 'Romantic' of American city life, Walt Whitman."

In folk literature all over the world we see numbers used significantly or purposefully, especially in catches and riddles. Often, their original significance gradually fades from folk memory as people advance in sophistication. Sometimes, we are tempted to read back into the simple folk use of these numbers a significance which belongs to the more advanced specula-

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tions of a later period. Whitman's "twenty-eight bathers" reminds us of number-games in American folk song:

"Twenty-nine links of chain around my leg  
And on each link is initial of my name."<sup>1</sup>

The number twenty-eight has puzzled Whitman's readers. Is there a significance in Whitman's use of this number? Was he, in his turn, influenced by any hint or suggestion derived from some personal or literary reminiscence? It has a ballad rhythm. It is half-allegorical, half-riddle in treatment. This section is in a different key and contrasts with the neighbouring sections. Do the numbers "twenty-eight" and "twenty-nine" signify anything? These numbers tease us, by giving us the key to a door which we cannot see, or perhaps does not exist, intensifying the riddle by raising false expectations of solution.

It is not known whether the number twenty-eight has any occult significance in Western or Eastern lore, and it is perhaps not necessary that it should trouble us overmuch. But Whitman teases and tempts us, by his challenging self-advertisements, to look further into the matter.

And I will not make a poem nor the least part of  
a poem but has reference to the soul,  
Because having looked at the objects of the universe,  
I find there is no one nor any particle of one but has  
reference to the soul.

<sup>1</sup> Here are others from *Games of Washington Children*, folk songs collected by W. H. Babcock:

Twenty-nine and one:

Thirty

Your face is dirty.

Or:

Last night and the night before

Twenty-four robbers came to my door.

Or:

Sixteen horses in my team

The leaders had no line

I whip them around a rocky road

To see that girl of mine.



The meaning of the section, the surface meaning, is plain. Twenty-eight young men, *all so friendly*, bathing in the sea are watched unseen by a twenty-eight-year-old "lonesome" woman who "owns the fine house by the rise of the bank." This lady remains unseen even when she comes out of the house and merrily mixes (either in person, or only in imagination) with the bathers. "The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them." Perhaps the lady stays within the house and is sporting among the bathers only in her imagination because *she ardently wishes to do so*. But, beyond this simple straightforward meaning of the section, is there something more?

## II

Here, let me draw the attention of the reader once again to one of "the ancient Hindoo books"—*Vishnu Purana*,<sup>2</sup> in which Parasara, acting as the poet Vyasa's mouth-piece, describes the different classes of creation to Maitreya. The animal creation is described as "... having the quality of darkness, they being destitute of knowledge... being formed of egotism and self-esteem, labouring under twenty-eight kinds of imperfection, manifesting inward sensations and associating with each other." Wilson adds in his note: "Twenty-eight kinds of *Badhas* which in the Sankhya system mean disabilities as defects of intellect, discontent, ignorance and the like."

Man, by reason of the twenty-eight imperfections is unable to see or know the soul. The soul (the richly drest invisible lady) sees them and sports with them, herself remaining unseen and unknown. The sea, as always in mystical writings, is the symbol of the phenomenal world-process, its cycles of birth and death. This interpretation may appear somewhat laboured. Only it mentions the number of imperfections, twenty-eight in all, which produce ignorance and spiritual blindness.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> It consists of long dialogues between sage Parasara and his disciple Maitreya on a number of subjects, philosophy, cosmogony, metaphysics, myths, geography and rules of conduct, all tending to the glorification of Vishnu.

<sup>3</sup> The number twenty-eight appears often in Hindu *Puranas*. It has a significance of which we have no clue. Wilson's preface to *Vishnu Purana* (Introduction to XIII) mentions Siva's twenty-eight incarnations.

III

In the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, King Yudishtira asks Bhishma, the warrior-sage, to explain to him the difference between *Jnana*, *Vignana* and *Bhakti*, the three different paths of Yoga. Bhishma explains the difference, beginning with the *Jnana* way to illumination. "*Jnana* (supreme illumination), he said, consists in perceiving the nine principles, the eleven organs, the five elements, and the three *gunas* in all creatures, and the one supreme soul (*Purusha*) or *Paramatman* permeating them all." The *Vignana* way is the way of discursive knowledge which investigates phenomena and the *Bhakti* way is the emotive, love-devotional way. What interests us here is that Bhishma describes man as made of twenty-eight mind-matter constituents. The Soul (*Purusha*) is the twenty-ninth, the unseen power residing within, remaining unperceived by the twenty-eight mind-matter constituents which are immersed in *samsara* (the phenomenal world). [*"She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window."*] She, however, sees and knows, while remaining unseen and unknown by the twenty-eight mind-matter constituents which are immersed in *samsara* the world-process, the eternal restless becoming, and the cycle of birth and death. The twenty-eight constituents "*all so friendly*" and co-operative in the body-mind complex of man do not know the soul, "*the lonesome woman, who bends down on them and caresses them with unseen hands. But she saw them and loved them.*"

But this is only another guess:

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you.  
(*Song of Myself*)

IV

Whitman's interest in the *Avatara* idea has often been noticed by scholars. It is the notion that the immortal soul manifests herself in new embodiments or incarnations on

the dissolution of the body.

Number twenty-eight is repeated later on in *Vishnu Purana* (pages 272-273) in another context. This appears to me to have a greater degree of relevance to Whitman's riddle. Parasara, the sage, refers to the succession of poet-sages born from age to age to deliver the perennial wisdom of the *Vedas* to mankind:

In every Dwapara age (the third of the Hindu Cycle) Vishnu in the person of Vyasa, in order to promote the good of mankind, divides the *Veda*, which is properly but one, into many portions. Observing the limited perseverance, energy and application of the mortals, he makes the *Veda* fourfold, to adapt it to their capacities; and the bodily form which he assumes, in order to effect that classification, is known by the name of *Veda Vyasa*.

Parasara then proceeds to give a list of such *Veda-Vyasa*s, the revealers of the perennial philosophy who have appeared so far:

Twenty-eight times have the *Vedas* been arranged by the great *Rishis* in the *Vaivaswatha Manwantara* in the Dwapara age, and consequently twenty-eight *Vyasa*s have passed away, by whom, in their respective periods, the *Veda* has been divided into four. [Here, the names of these twenty-eight *Vyasa*s follow.] . . . in the twenty-fifth, my father Sakti (power) was the *Vyasa*; I was the *Vyasa* of the twenty-sixth Dwapara and was succeeded by *Jaratguru*; the *Vyasa* of the twenty-eighth who followed him was Krishna Dwaipayana. These are the twenty-eight elder *Vyasa*s, by whom, in the preceding Dwapara ages, the *Veda* has been divided into four . . . . In the next Dwapara, Drouni, the son of Drona will be the *Vyasa*, when my son, the Muni Krishna Dwaipayana who is the actual *Vyasa* shall cease to be (in that character).

The twenty-ninth *Vyasa*, according to this narration, is the poet-prophet not yet born, who will deliver the perennial wisdom of the *Vedas* afresh in a form suited to the understanding and capacity of the people of the present age.

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We see from *Leaves of Grass* that Whitman entertained the notion that he was the poet-prophet of this age—the poet of “the evangel poem of comrades and of love.” Whitman had undoubtedly a serious religious intent when he wrote his *Leaves*:

I too following many, followed by many, inaugurate a new religion, I descend to the arena.

It may be I am destined to utter the loudest cries there the winner's pealing shout.

And he saw, “*projected through time*,” “*an audience interminable*.” It was to be his Bible of Democracy, “Israel with the science and the modern added,” as J. Burroughs described it, “promulging” a “new religion, sans theology, sans conventional pietism, sans priest. Whitman pointed to his New Jerusalem—the city of faithful friends, of the healthy and equal relish of what belongs to the body and to the soul. Dr. Bucke, one of Whitman's disciples, declared, “what the *Vedas* are to Brahminism, the Law and the Prophets to Judaism . . . the Gospels of Pauline writings to Christianity, the Quran to Mohammedanism, will *Leaves of Grass* be to the future American civilization.” He added: “*Leaves of Grass* belongs to a religious era not yet reached, of which it is the revealer and herald . . . It is the preface and creator of a new era.” Whitman had a deep sense of his prophetic-poet mission. His sense of mission is clearly to be seen on every page. His urge to deliver a message of religious import (not, by any means, to found a religion), to establish a divine world-brotherhood of man, pulses between the covers of his book. He was therefore conscious of his role as the prophet of a new era of fraternal human relations.

Know you, solely to drop in the earth the germs of a greater religion,

The following chants each for its kind I sing.

(Starting from *Paumanok*)

Whitman felt that, with regard to his own days and the

modern age, he was carrying out a task similar to the religious-prophet mission the future twenty-ninth *Vyasa* would perform for the good of mankind according to the Puranic prophecy.

An interesting if somewhat fanciful coincidence is that the Sanskrit word *Dṛona*, from which the *Drouni*, the name of the *Vyasa*-to-come is derived, means a *valley* or *hollow*. Louis Untermeyer mentions an interesting particular. Whitman's ancestors appear to have owned lands in Huntington in Long Island where the poet was born. "In 1694, in a patent defining the boundaries of the township, there is a spot described as 'Whitman's Dale or Hollow.'"

## v

When *Leaves of Grass* was first published in 1855, patriotically on July 4, it came out as a thin quarto bound in green cloth with the title and border stamped in gold leaf. There were elaborate designs of leaves, buds and small flowers as additional ornament on the covers. The title itself was overgrown with more leaves of grass resembling an un-weeded flowerbed. This kind of cover design was in fashion in those days. There was a steel-engraved frontispiece portrait of a young man with good features and a short beard. No author's name appeared on the title page, although the copyright claim was made in the name of Walter Whitman. The preface (pages iii to xii) had no title or heading. The poems carried no titles and ran from page 13 to 95.

The poem subsequently called *Song of Myself* led the rest. In this poem, the longest of the dozen appearing in the edition, we can find no clue to the identity of the poet. For twenty-eight pages we are teased by the orotund "I," but on the twenty-ninth page the poet reveals himself in the line:

"Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs,  
A kosmos. . . ."

(*Song of Myself*)

I confess the riddle still remains unsolved. Before we close this guessing game, I wish to suggest that twenty-nine perhaps refers to the year of Whitman's life, the climacteric year, when he gained, as if by a miracle, the transcendent vision which transformed him. Twenty-eight years he had spent in ignorance without a knowledge of his soul; now in the twenty-ninth he realised his true self which had remained hidden all along. This guess is supported by the strange jottings we see in his notebook of this period giving hints of a "change into something rich and strange."

[Since writing this Mr. Charles Feinberg, the great Whitman collector has sent me a micro-film of Whitman's copy of Cockburn's edition of *Bhagavad Gita*. Whitman has written the following marginal note on *Vyasa*: "The Vyasa, i.e. the compiler or arranger, particularly the Dwaipayana, latest or principal compiler of the Vedas, also the Mahabharata, the Purana etc." This information could have come to Whitman through Wilson's *Vishnu Purana* long before he wrote the poem.]



## THE IDEA OF REFINEMENT IN JAMES' *RODERICK HUDSON*

N. KRISHNA RAO

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HENRY JAMES employs the term "refinement" with an artistic insistence that invites its application as a controlling metaphor for his whole emergent vision of life. Although the idea of refinement is never given an explicit definition in the novels, James continuously places before the reader situations, actions, and characters, in the texture of whose felt life refinement runs like embroidery. In the Jamesian universe the notion of refinement reveals itself mainly as that element in human nature, and in the structure of society, which implicates the individual self in the possibility and fact of human change, growth, and transformation.

The entire fictional work of James can be viewed as an organic statement on the complex nature of human refinement. The major themes of James's novels, and the major phases of his artistic development, seem to organise themselves meaningfully into a unified field of vision from the perspective provided by the idea of refinement. The international theme, dramatizing the collision of two cultures, and the confrontation of American innocence with European experience, emerges as a parable of human refinement, in which the human personality is liberated into the wider freedom of a universal life. The theme of the pilgrim in search of society, as well as that of the artist in search of truth, may be similarly elaborated as explorations of a human refinement achieved by the individual's transcendence



of limited consciousness and his access to a higher awareness.

*The Portrait of a Lady* marks James' understanding that any creative relationship between the self and society must be founded on the refinement of the human consciousness. In the middle period of his career, James was continuously trying out the cultural and social inflections of human refinement, but the paradoxical nature and quality of the idea continued to tease him. In the novels of this period, he was preoccupied with the problem of evil and, accordingly, refinement is dramatized in terms of complex cultures and patterns of individual behaviour which are not amenable to the impact and influence of refinement. The characters appear to grasp more clearly what refinement is *not* than what it is.

In his three major novels, *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*, Henry James made a total recall of his earlier paradigms of refinement. Yet in these novels, without committing himself to a definition, he came pretty close to establishing the positive attributes of the ideal. These novels illustrate an emergent doctrine of human refinement as constituting itself as the final measure of human readiness, and of human ripeness.

In his first artistic phase, Henry James explores refinement as the process of achieving the truth of selfhood. In the middle period, he presents it in its vulnerable, corruptive, and critical aspects. In the major novels he dramatizes it not merely as a process of self-assertive virtue, but also as a mode of self-transcendence which has destroyed the barriers between the self and the world outside.

Viewed as an American novel, *Roderick Hudson* is the story of an innocent American brought up in moral abstractions, in quest of experience in the Europe of antiquity, of art and culture, of traditions and manners. The American comes to grief, James seems to say, not because Europe is wicked, but because his own consciousness and sensibility are unrefined and undeveloped through the inhibition of a conscience which is too timorous to launch out the self on the tides of cultural intensity. A consciousness which lacks refinement, moral, intellectual, or spiritual, is doomed to suffering and destruction.

Roderick's tragedy is the tragedy of an artist who fails to

comprehend or exercise intellectual refinement as an aesthetic absolute. A devoted artist should have the refinement of the mind in order to foresee the pitfalls of blind and passionate involvement. While being intensely aware of the fruits of deeply involved and felt experiences, the artist should have the patient detachment of the intellect in order to concretise his assimilated experiences into the illuminations of artistic reality. Commenting on James' presentation of the successful artist in his fiction, Maurice Beebe remarks that the successful artist in James's fiction is almost always seen with his back turned, which is a symbol of the detachment required for success.<sup>1</sup> Roderick has the flair for "the simple, sensuous, confident relish of pleasure," but he is without the salutary detachment born of intellectual refinement. No artist should be a slave to his passions, but Roderick is. Cultivation of passions by an artist is not in itself a bad thing, but overindulgence in them is definitely harmful. Rowland rightly remarks, "a man of genius owes as much deference to his passions as any other, but not a particle more."<sup>2</sup> In fine, "nothing in excess" should be the motto for the artist.

Roderick is launched into the world by his patron, Rowland, and thrown into the midst of temptations in order that he might make "love to opportunity" and refine his consciousness and sensibility for artistic excellence. But the opportunities that come his way are wasted, for Roderick is not a master of his passions. Torn between the pulls of art on one side and passion on the other, Roderick allows himself to be swept away and destroyed by his passion. The artist is better without excesses of emotion and passion. Poor Roderick is caught in a whirlpool of emotions and passions from which he is unable to escape, because he is by nature very passionate and emotional, and to this is added the "stimulus of strong emotion" and "precarious passion." Furthermore, he has "a large capacity for ruin," and the result is that, although he has genius, he is rendered sterile as an artist by his negative qualities. No artist could afford to be egotistical, for that would spoil "the essen-

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Beebe, "The Turned Back of Henry James," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LIII (Oct., 1954), 521-539.

<sup>2</sup> *Roderick Hudson* (Harper Torchbook edn., 1960), p. 45. All subsequent references to the text are to this edition.

al good health of the sincere imagination" (p. 49), but Roderick is egotistical, cruel and obstinate. An artist with intellectual refinement possesses a consciousness which is highly sensitive, sympathetic and, at the same time, objective and dispassionate. Hudson is not industrious, purposeful and sincere. Instead of hammering away at his profession with exemplary diligence when his golden mood is gone, he takes to riotous living. He does not have the wisdom, which comes from refinement of the mind, to realise that the artist is great in relation to the strength of his confirmed purpose and acquired will-power. Rowland warns him of the dangers of a life of coarse and vulgar sensations for an artist. He says, "don't play such dangerous games with your facility. If you have got facility, respect it, nurse it, adore it, save it up" (p. 102). But the warning is lost on Hudson who knows his weaknesses, but does not have the strength of mind to overcome them. He knows that he is alarmingly susceptible, by nature, to the grace and the beauty, and the mystery of woman" (p. 103), and yet he does not make any attempt to protect his integrity as an artist.

Roderick has imagination and creative ability, but is without self-control which only a refined mind could give. He knows that he is leading a dangerous life for an artist. At Geneva, he remorsefully tells Rowland that "he had done with the flesh and devil and was counting the hours till he should re-enter the true temple of his faith" (p. 101). He realises the sanctity of the life of an artist and his own transgressions of it. But he is too egoistical and passionate to make his reformation a permanent one. When he comes to Rome fresh from his New England village, where opportunities for self-indulgence are non-existent, Roderick is pure in spirit and idealistic in his aspirations. He makes statues of sheer loveliness and perfection. Ugliness enters his consciousness when he finds in Europe unlimited opportunities to gratify his ego and passions. He runs after opportunities for self-indulgence and lets go the wonderful opportunities which Europe offers for his development as an artist. Europe is not to blame if Roderick chooses to take what is evil in her. He thus misses artistic greatness for want of refinement. Life deals severely with an artist who comes to it, not as a conqueror, but as a slave of its passions.

Roderick, being what he is, "with a large capacity for ruin," would have brought ruin upon himself even in his New England village. The fault is not in this particular country or that, but in Roderick himself. His want of intellectual refinement is driven home in the episode in which Mr. Leavenworth approaches Roderick to commission a "representation in pure white marble of the idea of intellectual refinement" (p. 198). Roderick, as an artist, has made only statues of great beauty because he has seen and felt beauty with all the consciousness of his being. But, intellectual refinement is an idea with which he is unfamiliar, because he himself does not have it. The statue he makes is not a success. Mr. Leavenworth is not satisfied with it because Roderick, the artist, has not succeeded in bringing out the idea effectively. He says, "Intellectual Refinement, there should be no mistaking the intellect, symbolised by an unmistakably thoughtful brow" (p. 200). Roderick has failed because he himself does not know what it is to have a thoughtful brow. He is unaware of the refinement which the intellect can give to the artist. He undoubtedly has genius as an artist, but mere genius without the graces of the mind can at best produce a few flashes in the pan, and nothing more. His temperament and character are against his becoming a great artist. Egoism has blunted the edge of his intellect so much that he is conscious only of himself and his passionate needs, and totally unaware of the sacrifices and sufferings of his patron, Rowland, and of his own relations. The realization that he has been selfish and cruel comes to him when Rowland condemns him as a heartless egoist. He confesses, "Certainly. I've been damnably stupid. Isn't an artist supposed to be a man of fine perception? I'ven't, as it turns out, had one" (p. 325).

Roderick has failed as an artist, and as a human being, for want of fine perception, and once he is aware of his shortcoming, he decides not to be a stumbling block and a source of suffering and unhappiness to his friends. The failure of Roderick is due to the failure of his intellectual sensibility, which is unrefined and undeveloped. One can easily understand Christina's strange behaviour towards Roderick. She understands his weakness and is disappointed with him. She is fascinated by his personality and genius, but is repelled by his weakness.

Even the perverse Christina evidently knows the strength which a refined intellect could give to an individual. She knows the advantages of a refined mind, for, as she remarks, "we make debts for clothes and champagne but we can't spend a sou on our poor benighted minds. And yet . . . I really like things for the mind" (p. 276). She has sized up Roderick's intellectual weakness and she feels sorry for his being weak with all his genius as an artist. She, therefore, understands that Rowland is the stronger and more masculine of the two. No wonder it is that she insists on Rowland telling her his opinion of her. She admires Rowland's "measured mind" and pities poor Roderick for being "weak." The intensity, sympathy, and objectivity of great art, James says, are the result of a genius which is enriched by intellectual refinement. Roderick's spiritual refinement, which enables him to feel and respond to the beauty and sanctity of things, is helpless without the refinement of the mind, which alone could have given his art detachment and power. His moral awareness is only a temporary truce which art has made with life; but it fails to lead him to that obstinate finality of life and art bound up in the nut-shell of Permanent Truth.

Rowland, on the contrary, has intellectual refinement and moral passion, but is without the refinement of the spirit. Cecilia pays a handsome compliment to Rowland's refinement and manners. She says that Rowland has "a turn for doing nice things and behaving yourself properly. You have it, in the first place, in your character. You mean, if you will pardon my putting it so, thoroughly well. Ask Bessie if you don't hold her more gently and comfortably than any of her other admirers." And Bessie declares, "He holds me more comfortably than Hudson" (p. 22). Rowland's superiority over Hudson lies in his refinement and manners. Rowland is intelligent, well informed, and has a discriminating generosity. He is rich and unoccupied and believes that "you're expected not to run your course without having done something handsome for your fellowmen" (p. 64). His rich father, a strict Puritan, had trained him in abstinent habits, and his Puritan bent of mind draws him away from self-indulgence of any kind. He is intellectually refined enough to be aware of his own limitations. He lacks "the prime requisite of an expert flaneur—the simple, sensuous confident relish of

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pleasure" (p. 28). The glow of happiness for him, he believes, "must be found either in action of some thoroughly keen kind on behalf of an idea or in producing a masterpiece in one of the arts" (p. 30). Happiness for him as an artist is ruled out because he is not an artist—"he could only buy pictures and not paint them" (p. 30). He would very much have liked to have been born a vigorous young man of genius without a penny, but as it is he is just a young man of wealth and refinement. So it is natural that he envies the happy youth who in a New England village, without help or encouragement, without models or examples, had found it so easy to make lovely statues. Since he cannot enjoy artistic happiness, he can derive happiness by engaging himself "in action of some thoroughly keen kind on behalf of an idea." Rowland realises that here was an opportunity for him to fulfil his own ambitions vicariously in the art of Roderick. By assisting Roderick, he would have the pleasure and satisfaction of helping an artist achieve his fulfilment, and, more important than that, this act of his would give "at least a reflected usefulness" to his life for offering Roderick his opportunity. Praise for Roderick's artistic excellence would indirectly mean praise for Rowland himself.

With enthusiasm Rowland initiates his project of transforming Roderick into a great artist. Cecilia wonders that "for a man who's generally averse to meddling". Rowland is "suddenly rather officious" (p. 48). James makes it clear that Rowland by nature is not a meddler, but that in this instance Rowland has thrown his scruples to the winds, despite the advice of Cecilia to let Hudson alone, and despite Rowland's own conviction that "the artist is better for a quiet life." The behaviour of Rowland is puzzling to Cecilia because she does not understand that Rowland is seeking fulfilment of his own aspirations in the person of Roderick Hudson. The first statues of Roderick are a success and Rowland is happy and satisfied with Roderick and himself. Rowland is badly shaken when he realises that Roderick as an artist and as a man is incomplete. Roderick is temperamental, impulsive, selfish, and passionate. He does not have the refinement of the mind to be aware of things in their proper perspective. Spiritual refinement, which enables the artist to passionately respond to beauty, without the controlling power

of intellectual refinement is exposed to dangers and temptations, and intellectual fineness without spiritual refinement is unproductive. It is unfortunate that, between Rowland and Roderick, each does not have what the other has. Rowland finds himself interfering in the personal life of Roderick when he realises that he is deeply in love with Mary Garland, who is sincerely devoted to Roderick. The golden mood of creation deserts Roderick completely when his infatuation for Christina becomes worse. Rowland has to confess to Mrs. Hudson and Mary that Roderick is an "unexpected failure." He realises that his idea had taken shape only to be shattered by Roderick's perversity and wildness.

Rowland does not have the spiritual refinement or awareness to make allowances for the unpredictable elements in human nature and behaviour. He does not give up or abandon his idea, but shows remarkable patience and charity in the hope that Roderick would somehow come to his senses. His patience snaps ultimately when Roderick accuses him of being stupid and insensitive to Christina's affection and regard for him. He thereupon condemns Roderick as a heartless egoist, and this denunciation leads to Roderick's suicide. He realises that he should have left Roderick alone and not meddled with his life. He has committed the "unpardonable sin" of interfering in the life of a fellow human being, all for the sake of an idea of "reflected usefulness" to his own life. He has been, all along, aware of his interference in Roderick's life, and has been amazed at his own temerity when he reflected "that he was really meddling with the simple stillness of this small New England home, and that he had ventured to disturb so much living security in the interest of a far-away fantastic hypothesis" (p. 69).

Rowland persists with his folly because the hypothesis of "reflected usefulness" takes hold of him so firmly that he cannot abandon it for his own fulfilment. His hypothesis is so precious to him that he is callous in his disregard of the freedom and sanctity of human life. What Roderick resents most is that he is not given the freedom to live his life. He tells Rowland, "You seem to have taken the measure of my liberty with extraordinary minuteness" (p. 150). He argues, "I'm not a small boy nor a country lout any longer, and whatever I do, I do

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with my eyes open. When I do well the merit's my own; if I do ill, the fault's my own" (p. 150). This reveals incidentally that moral responsibility is a fruitful ingredient in the artist's education. Roderick wants to feel that he is his own master and responsible only to himself. He wants freedom to shape his career, and as an artist he knows the value and sanctity of his freedom. Men should be allowed to "live on their own terms and according to their own inexorable needs" (p. 153). Do not play the Creator, James says, to your fellow human things; respect the individual's life and liberty. He, who could do nothing about his own destiny, presumes to shape the destiny of an innocent man and in the process destroys him altogether. Rowland Mallet's name is significant as the mallet is an instrument with which things are beaten into a shape.<sup>3</sup> Mallet tries to beat his hypothesis into a shape, thereby involving an innocent man in suffering and death. A man of intellectual refinement and moral ardour commits a spiritual blunder by underestimating the liberty of the individual and the sanctity of human life. It is no wonder, therefore, that Rowland, the most rational of men, in the end lashes his conduct "with a scourge of steel, accusing it of cruelty and injustice" (p. 333), for he has learnt a lesson in spiritual refinement.





## THE ALBANY COUSIN AND TWO HEROINES OF HENRY JAMES

O. P. SHARMA

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### I

THE IMAGE of Minny Temple, Henry James' Albany Cousin, with whom he renewed his relationship in about her seventeenth year and continued it on an intense emotional plane till she died at the age of twenty-four, is richly and deeply embedded in his memory and consciousness as a man and creative artist. This image provides the primal clue to the understanding of his American heroines; in its growth it mirrors the evolution of the mind and aesthetic philosophy of Henry James.<sup>1</sup> It is firmly rooted and carries within its orbit the force and sanction of an intensely felt experience, which fertilized in the soil of "the artist's prime sensibility",<sup>2</sup> grows into a vision of life. The study of this growth unfolds the process of transmutation of his personal loss and pain into a value and subject of art. The image

<sup>1</sup> Neither Philip Rahv's "The Heiress of All the Ages" (*Partisan Review*, X, May-June 1943, 227-247) nor Lotus Snow's "The Disconcerting Poetry of Mary Temple: A Comparison of the Imagery of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove*" (*New England Quarterly*, XXXI, September 1958, 312-339) makes any attempt to construct and evolve the image of Minny Temple or to relate it closely to the development of Henry James's American heroines as revealed in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove*.

<sup>2</sup> Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1934), p. 45.

thus emanating directly from life is represented as growing into "an acquisition" enshrined in the imagination, and yet inexorably in progress with increasing volition and vitality of its own, till it claims immortality through the American heroines of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove*—finally "translated from this changing realm of fact to the steady realm of thought"<sup>3</sup> as visualized by James in 1870.

The personal lineaments of Minny Temple's nature are vividly reflected in her letters written to John Chipman Gray and Henry James, later included by Henry James in his *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914). Written during the period before her death, they reveal a sensitive and imaginative young girl in the midst of a process of disintegration, suffering and dwindling inch by inch, victim of a series of life-sucking hæmorrhages, breathing the life measured out to her by the doctors and yet showing irrepressible zest for life, its beauty and sunshine:

I had a hæmorrhage a week ago, which rather took the life out of me; . . . The old consolatory remark, "Patience, neighbor and shuffle the cards," ought to impart a little hope . . . but it's a long time since I've had any trumps in my hand, and you know that with the best luck the game always tired me.<sup>4</sup>

The last lines she ever wrote express a pathetic longing for eternal beauty and companionship in life: "I feel the greatest longing for summer or spring; I should like it to be always spring for the rest of my life and to have all the people I care for always with me! But who wouldn't like it so? Good-bye."<sup>5</sup>

The image thus vividly emerging from her travail is sharpened and confirmed by Henry James's projections in the form of reminiscences contained in *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914).<sup>6</sup> She is described as wrapped around many lives, "as a

<sup>3</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, *The James Family, Including Selections from the Writings of Henry James, Senior, William, Henry and Alice James* (New York, 1947), p. 261.

<sup>4</sup> *Autobiography*, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York, 1956), p. 541.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 543.

<sup>6</sup> Pp. 282-284.

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young and shining apparition" and as the "ominously palest flower of the stem." James recognises in her "the very figure and image of a felt interest in life, an interest as magnanimously far-spread, or as familiar and exquisitely fixed, as her splendid shifting sensibility." She was to endure with him as "the supreme case of a taste for life as life, as personal living," and "the very muse or amateur priestess of rash speculation." She is imagined as "a disengaged and dancing flame of thought." Finally, he adds: "She burned herself out; she died at twenty-four."

Minnie Temple died on March 8, 1870, at Newport. The news of her death was conveyed to Henry James by his mother on March 26, 1870. The letter that he wrote back to her the same day is vital in locating the earliest roots of the image of Minny Temple, soaked in the immediacy and intensity of his personal grief.<sup>7</sup> It is a human document, full of passionate self-involvement, written from the closest range of the realization that she in "dead—silent—absent forever—she the very heroine of our common scene." "Oh poor struggling suffering *dying* creature" is the agonized cry touched off by proximity of the painful occurrence. There is an acute awareness of her physical extinction and absence, and he clutches at details and facts about her last days to aid his visual image of her. Old associations swarm into his mind and he is "enjoying the exquisite pain they provoke." He expresses his faith: "Twenty years hence what a pure eloquent vision she will be." The letter ends with his consciousness of having given a plebeian expression to his sorrow: "My letter doesn't read otherwise, but I have written off my unreason."

Three days later, on March 29, 1870, Henry James wrote to William James on the subject of Minny Temple's death.<sup>8</sup> This letter, on closer comparative scrutiny than has been bestowed upon it in this context by eminent critics, helps us to establish the image and to project it into the aesthetic realm of the future. In its philosophic tone and attitude of positive acceptance of the fact of Minny Temple's death, it releases the images from the

<sup>7</sup> See *The Selected Letters of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel (New York, 1955), pp. 33-36.

<sup>8</sup> Letter quoted in *The James Family*, ed. Matthiessen, pp. 259-263.

state of self-involvement of the earlier letter and launches it into the area of creative experience. This letter when placed in proper perspective serves as almost a prophetic testament of the artist's resolve to transmute a personal memory and lament into an abiding vision in the years to come. Henry James confronts "the idea of her gain in eternal freedom and rest." This affirms the sentiment and hope of his earlier letter addressed to his mother: "There is absolute balm in the thought of poor Minny at *rest*—rest and immortal absence." But the emphasis has in his second letter shifted from the "immortal absence," the fact of her physical and earthly elimination, to "eternal freedom," her release from the earthly limitations. The shift is from a feeling of negative void to a sense of positive gain.

Again in the letter to his mother, Henry James expects that time will bring "the poignant sense of loss and irremediable absence," while in the second letter he states: "Time, of course, will bring almost even-handedly the inevitable pain and the inexorable cure." Here time by bringing detachment will heighten the pain in such a manner that it will carry within it the sublime compulsion of its cure. This is nearer the aesthetic approach to the problem of pain.

Besides, in his earlier letter the stress is insistently upon perpetuating the personal memory of Minny Temple, of getting her "embalmed forever in our hearts and lives . . . . Twenty years hence what a pure eloquent vision she will be." In his second letter under scrutiny Henry James helps to transport her image into the timeless sphere. He transmutes a personal wish and memory into the affirmation of a creative writer. Here is a pledge to subtilize her into a lasting reality, by the force of the imaginative impact of the felt experience associated with her:

I could shed tears of joy far more copious than any tears of sorrow when I think of her feverish earthly lot exchanged for this serene promotion into pure fellowship with our memories, thoughts and fancies. . . . The more I think of her the more perfectly satisfied I am to have her translated from this changing realm of fact to the steady realm of thought.

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There she may bloom into a beauty more radiant than our dull eyes will avail to contemplate.<sup>9</sup>

He deepens and affirms further the significance of her changed and elevated state of being:

What once was life is always life, in one form for another, and speaking simply of this world I feel as if in effect and influence Minny had lost very little by her change of state. She lives as a steady unfaltering luminary in the mind rather than as a flickering wasting earth-stifled lamp . . . her image will preside in my intellect, in fact, as a sort of measure and standard of brightness and repose.<sup>10</sup>

Instead of losing "by her change of state," Minny Temple has gained in finer essence and intensity of being. She has been transformed into an immortal flame of life. She has been alchemised free of space by shedding evanescence, decay and mortality. Freed from a slice of time, she will live in an eternal moment in the realm of art. Her image will endure and preside in his intellect. It will find its aesthetic salvation eventually in Isabel Archer and Milly Theale. "What once was life is always life, in one form or another."

Suddenly the personal quirk returns on the human plane: "While I sit spinning my sentences, she is dead. . . ." He feels guilty as if trying to escape the painful reality of her death by indulging "in this fruitless attempt to transmute it from a hard fact into a soft idea." Even at this stage of the distillation of the image, Henry James shows remarkable awareness of the complexity of his undertaking. The pain persists as the emotional validity of the experience; it has got to be saved from the fruitless attempt to transmute it "from a hard fact into a soft idea," as that will mean the artist licking his own wounds in sheer self-indulgence. This will signify the betrayal of the fundamental function of art. As such he will carry her as "a steady unfaltering luminary of the mind"—a transformed spectrum of

<sup>9</sup> *The James Family*, p. 261.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

life. "Twenty years hence we shall be living with your patience."

Finally by focussing upon the American nature of Minny Temple and her predicament in an English setting, Henry James forestalls the peculiar dilemma of American heroines like Isabel Archer and Milly Theale, and states in a capsuled form the inherent conflict of his international theme:

Every time that I have been out during the last three days, the aspect of things has perpetually seemed to enforce her image by simple contrast and difference. The landscape as presents stolidly enough to her death; it would have ministered but scantily to her life. She was a breathing protest against English grossness, English compromises and conventions—a plant of pure American growth.<sup>11</sup>

## II

The image of Minny Temple was, however, not to wait or lie inert for literally twenty years, as serialization of *The Portrait of a Lady* had started in 1880, even though it was actually published in 1881. James recaptures the nebulous origin of his novel in "a single character—an acquisition." He conceives the image as firmly rooted and yet undergoing organic growth. It is visualized as gathering momentum of its own and steadily moving toward aesthetic fruition during these years: "Enough that I was, as seemed to me, in complete possession of it, that I had been so far a long time, that this had made it familiar and yet had not blurred its charm, and that, all urgently, all tormentingly I saw it in motion and, so to speak, in transit. . . ." <sup>12</sup>

The fact that Henry James finds his "vivid individual" shaped into "identity" without being "engaged in the tangle" can be explained only in terms of the emotional intensity of his acquisition and the dynamic nature of its evolution since 1870. His awareness of the process is signalled by the remark, "By what process of logical accretion was this slight 'personality,' the mere slim shade of an intelligent but presumptuous girl,

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 47.

to find itself endowed with the high attributes of a subject."<sup>13</sup>

James adds new dimensions to the image by identifying Isabel Archer with the heroines of George Eliot and Shakespeare, in the words of George Eliot herself: "In these frail vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affection."<sup>14</sup> Isabel is one of the "frail vessels" like Hetty Sorrel, Maggie Tulliver, Rosamund Vincy and Gwendolen Harleth, but like them and some of Shakespeare's heroines, she is destined to be the perennial archetypal messenger and bearer of "the treasure of human affection." This concept links Isabel Archer with the "deep domestic moral affectional realm" of Minny Temple.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, by floating her on a timeless human mission, Henry James makes her transcend her sheer American character, without shedding its firm roots therein.

In her shifting and effusive sensibility, elusive and unrestrained imagination, effervescent idealism, her naturalness and innocence, the purity of her motives, her integrity, her love of freedom, her contempt for the sordid, conventional and feudal, and her pursuit of happiness, Isabel Archer is the inheritor of the legacy of Minny Temple, which she bequeathes, richer and fuller, through her experiences as the artist's vision. "Upon her limitations, now, it seems idle to dwell" was Henry James's comment on Minny Temple's death.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless he gave a discerning estimate of her failings and limitations, which could serve as her pathetic epitaph and later, a note of caution to Isabel Archer:

Her character may be almost literally said to have been without practical application to life. She seems a sort of experiment of nature . . . a mere subject without object. She was at any rate the helpless victim and toy of her own intelligence. . . . She was a case of pure generosity . . . for—inasmuch as she could hardly have suffered at the hands of others nearly as keenly as she did at her own.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> *The James Family*, p. 263.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



In Isabel Archer the image has been cast within the severer and fuller mould of art. She is introduced full of curiosity and buoyancy of life which emanates from her sensibility and imagination fed upon fantasies and ideals. She is athirst for her adventure with life and her quest of knowledge in her own way. Her "delicate desultory flame-like spirit"<sup>18</sup> reminds us of Minny's apparition as a "disengaged and dancing flame of thought."<sup>19</sup> She loves places where sad things have happened. Being in love with romantic fantasy and melancholy, she is not afraid of ghosts, but she is certainly afraid of suffering. She plunges into introspection, which to her is like "an exercise in the open air," from which one returns "with a lapful of roses" (*Portrait*, I, 72). Henry James touches her tender weak spot when he comments:

But she was often reminded that there were . . . a great many places which were not gardens at all—only dusky pestiferous tracts, planted thick with ugliness and misery. . . . What should one do with the misery of the world in a scheme of the agreeable for one's self? It must be confessed that this question never held her long. She was too young, too impatient to live, too unacquainted with pain. (*Portrait*, I, 73).

Her highly charged imagination is gripped by a romantic and melodramatic fantasy of "a swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see," and that is her "idea of happiness" (*Portrait*, I, 235). Henrietta thinks she is a "creature of risks" and that she is "drifting to some great mistake" (*Portrait*, I, 235). Henrietta is too hysterical to be a soothsayer, but in her own odd way she represents for Isabel the pressure of unpleasant reality so as to debunk her vapid illusions about life: "The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams. You're not enough in contact with reality—with the toiling, striving, suffering I may even say, sinning, world that surrounds you. You're too fastidious; you've too many graceful illusions" (*Portrait*, I, 310).

<sup>18</sup> Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (in two volumes, Modern Library, New York, 1951), p. 69. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

<sup>19</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 283.

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On the other extreme sits Ralph Touchett, the eternal invalid—the spectator, the Greek chorus of “our heroine,” the inveterate scoffer and mocker, but at heart the invincible visionary. In his invalidism and unclassified passion for Isabel, Ralph Touchett echoes the James-Minny Temple equation. For him Isabel is “finer than the finest work of art” (*Portrait*, I, 86). He views her with the imaginative passion of a Pygmalion. He contemplates her as his imaginative rocket for his experiments with life, mostly out of space, being inhibited from an active participation in it himself. It is significant that he insists upon the Shelleyan imagery of the wings and flight and provides the unfailing stimulus to Isabel to soar heaven-ward: “Spread your wings: rise above the ground. It’s never wrong to do that.” (*Portrait*, I, 319).

Ralph sustains his image throughout and views Isabel’s marriage with Osmond as a fall from an ethereal flight: “You seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue—to be, sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men. Suddenly some one tosses up a faded rosebud—a missile that should never have reached you—and straight you drop to the ground” (*Portrait*, II, 69-70). Later Henry James underlines “her poor winged spirit” (*Portrait*, II, 160), and in moments of gloomy introspection of her predicament, Isabel grows painfully aware of her descent from “the high places of happiness . . . downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression” (*Portrait*, II, 189). The image of the wings, suggested in *The Portrait of a Lady*, will mature into symbolic dimensions of the dove in *The Wings of the Dove*. The deepest emotional plane of Isabel is related to the images of darkness and sea, evoking the feelings of suffocation and sinking. The sea imagery is carried forward with consummate effect to heighten the tension and pathos of Milly Theale.

Isabel is surrounded by conflicting influences, but she insists upon living her life. She has her inherent contradictions and strikes one as a sublime and touching paradox on many occasions—“the most charming of polygons” as Ralph called her (*Portrait*, I, 213). She seeks knowledge and happiness to the exclusion of unpleasant reality of both, and yet she breaks down repeatedly with premonitions of her unhappiness. It comes over

her that she is not destined to be happy in an extraordinary way by turning away from life, its dangers and sufferings. After her melodramatic utterance on personal freedom to Caspar Goodwood ("I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock"), she collapses and trembles all over like a "smitten harp" (*Portrait*, I, 229-231). In moments of exultation and ostensible triumph she flutters with tremors of weakness and fright. She feels herself precariously poised upon the brink of some hidden precipice like Milly Theale. Consequently she is not able to resist the malevolent pressure and hypnotic spell of Madame Merle and Osmond. Refusing to be annexed by the English feudal baron and the American philistine, she succumbs through her inexperience and self-delusion into the abysmal pit of "darkness" and "suffocation". In the vigil scene which, in its essence, Henry James calls the "vigil of searching criticism,"<sup>20</sup> she is assailed by polarities, doubts and terrors—tormenting visions and nightmarish realities. "Suffering, with Isabel, was an active condition; it was not a chill, a stupor, a despair; it was a passion of speculation, of response to every pressure." (*Portrait*, II, 189). Eventually, she sees the ghost. She accepts affirmation of life through closer experience of "the agonies, the strife, of human heart," to use the Keatsian image for limited application. One wonders how F. R. Leavis could ignore this aspect of Isabel Archer's character and dilemma while dubbing her as "the free American girl moving on the Old World stage as an indefinitely licensed and privileged interloper."<sup>21</sup>

It is not without meaning that the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* does not mention the American nature and character of Isabel Archer, while the Preface to *The Wings of the Dove* features the young American as "heir of all the ages." As already examined, the archetypal and larger human destiny of Isabel Archer (even though one of the "frail vessels") is clearly emphasized by Henry James. On closer scrutiny this image of the heroine is, more or less confirmed, particularly when projected into a comparison with Milly Theale. All the same her nature is deeply rooted in the American tradition and values.

<sup>20</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 57.

<sup>21</sup> *The Great Tradition*, (London, 1948), p. 98.

from which she, to a great degree, derives her strength and failings. But she attempts to transcend its limitations by claiming to possess a cosmopolitan outlook.

Mrs. Touchett, who discovers and launches Isabel into the world, observes about her: "She thinks she knows a great deal of it [the world]—like most American girls; but like most American girls she's ridiculously mistaken." (*Portrait*, I, 56). Mrs. Touchett further dispels the flirtatious Daisy Miller air about Isabel by saying, "You may suspect that at first, but you'll be wrong." (*Portrait*, I, 57-58).

Isabel has a remarkable duality of attitude towards America and the rest of the world. She can defend the British Constitution against the prejudiced vituperations of her aunt with a moral zeal, and can warm up into fervid patriotism, when Ralph ridicules her as Columbia, by insisting that "she would be as American as it pleased him to regard her" (*Portrait*, I, 83). To the insinuation of Lord Warburton that Americans amuse themselves with the foibles of other nations, she can be candid in her self-appraisal as an American by observing, "As regards that, . . . I should find in my own nation entertainment for a life time." (*Portrait*, I, 112). Provoked by Ralph's cynical thrusts she is histrionic in her defense of Henrietta as "a kind of emanation of the great democracy", and conjures up a beautiful vision of America: "I like the great country stretching away beyond the river and across the prairies, blooming and smiling and spreading till it stops at the green Pacific." (*Portrait*, I, 130). She insists upon her points of view which she calls "thoroughly American" (*Portrait*, I, 81), and adds later: "I don't want to swagger, but I suppose I am rather versatile." (*Portrait*, I, 130).

If Isabel doesn't accept Lord Warburton, it is not because he is an Englishman, but because he represents to her mind an acquisitive feudal "system", wherein lies a menace to her own free "orbit" (*Portrait*, I, 144). It is precisely this proprietary attitude of Osmond, who is of American origin, that mortifies her, when through marriage he seeks to annex her mind as a conquered slave territory. She finds Caspar Goodwood unacceptable, as he is an unimaginative philistine, and the fact of his being an American does not change the pattern of values

for her. Provoked by Caspar Goodwood's insinuation against the English lord, she retorts, "And pray isn't an Englishman a human being!" (*Portrait*, I, 225). It is, in fact, in conflict with the narrow-mindedness and insularity of her own fellow Americans like Caspar that she insists more vehemently upon a cosmopolitan view: "The world—with all these places so arranged and so touching each other—comes to strike one as rather small" (*Portrait*, I, 227). It is in conflict with the perversions and depravities of Osmond and Madame Merle, both Europeanized Americans, that the innate strength, purity and nobility of her character shine with a gem-like flame.

The English society has been treated in *The Portrait of a Lady* on the level of manners. It poses no deeper moral menace as in *The Wings of the Dove*. The spil of England is neither too banal nor too fatal for Isabel Archer. This grim conflict is apportioned to Milly Theale and attains its moving dramatic intensity in *The Wings of the Dove*. Isabel Archer, in fact, sees "the ghost" in the twilight of the English Gardencourt, and it is "through the darkness" there that she sees "a very straight path." (*Portrait*, II, 436).

### III

The Preface to *The Wings of the Dove* begins with a clear and emphatic statement about the origin of the idea of the firmly rooted image:

"The Wings of the Dove," published in 1902, represents to my memory a very old—if I shouldn't perhaps rather say a very young motive.... The idea, reduced to its essence, is that of a young person conscious of a great capacity for life, but early stricken and doomed, condemned to die under short respite, while also enamoured of the world; aware moreover of the condemnation and passionately desiring to "put in" before extinction as many of the finer vibrations as possible .... Long had I turned it over, standing off from it, yet coming back to it.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 288.

*Two Heroines of Henry James*

Later in 1914 Henry James summed up in retrospect the tragic circumstances of Minny Temple's death and his attempt at embalming her in art form, which clearly suggests the emergence of Milly Theale of *The Wings of the Dove*:

None the less did she in fact cling to consciousness; death, at the last, was dreadful to her; she would have given anything to live—and the image of this, which was long to remain with me, appeared so of the essence of tragedy that I was in the far-off aftertime to seek to lay the ghost by wrapping it, a particular occasion aiding, in the beauty and dignity of art.<sup>23</sup>

In Milly Theale, the Minny Temple image is completely fused and integrated. It is sharply edged and chiselled, attaining both the fine intensity and amplitude of spirit. The stress, even in the midst of decay and liquidation, is invariably upon the heroic and touching nature of the struggle, and the desperate bid to hold on to life in its idealized framework. Finally by affirming the American character of his heroine, Henry James has completed the organic process of Minny Temple's image, by making "a plant of pure American growth"<sup>24</sup> sprout into "the last fine flower—blooming alone, for the fullest attestation of her freedom—of an old New York stem."<sup>25</sup> Besides, "the very heroine of the common scene"<sup>26</sup> of 1870 has finally emerged in 1902 as "the heir of all the ages": "I had from far back mentally projected a certain sort of young American as more the 'heir of all the ages' than any other young person whatever . . . so that here was a chance to confer on some such figure a supremely touching value."<sup>27</sup>

In Milly Theale we revert to the touching intensity of the original image with greater detachment and range. With her we plunge into the vortex of a poignant and grim conflict on physical, social and moral planes. Milly Theale struggles on

<sup>23</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 544.

<sup>24</sup> *The James Family*, p. 263.

<sup>25</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 292.

<sup>26</sup> *Selected Letters*, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 292.

more than one front with missioned concentration of spirit. Her life is attuned to higher and finer values. She does not assail the world with the juvenile gusto of Isabel, who demonstrates her freedom and suffers the consequences. Milly Theale enjoys unqualified freedom but is conditioned at the same time by inner restraints, tensions and compulsions: "I can do exactly what I like .... I haven't a creature to ask .... I can shake about till I'm black and blue. That perhaps isn't all joy; but lots of people, I know, would like to try it."<sup>28</sup>

Milly Theale, "One of the finest, one of the rarest ... cases of American intensity" (*Wings*, p. 106), is conceived in an elevated pitch as almost poised upon the edge of an inner and outer precipice symbolized by her hazardous perch on the cliff (*Wings*, pp. 105-108). For her there is no easy exit. Isabel Archer in her predicament has reflected: "She should never escape; she should last to the end." (*Portrait*, II, 398). Milly Theale, with almost uncanny premonition about her fate, feels that she is "reserved for some more complicated passage." (*Wings*, p. 107). "It would be a question of taking full in the face the whole assault of life." (*Wings*, p. 107). She has tearful moments of identification with the "Bronzino"—the portrait of a magnificent woman, "handsome in sadness...dead, dead, dead." (*Wings*, p. 171). By the verdict of the doctor, she finds her life "put in the scales." (*Wings*, p. 182). She sets out to see the world like the spirited Isabel Archer, but she is doomed to live with the mute Victorian bronzes on the walls. In utter loneliness she says, "I'm a survivor—a survivor of a general wreck." (*Wings*, p. 186). The discovery of her ailment makes her pathetically say to herself, "It is me it concerns." (*Wings*, p. 184). Then with painful brevity she adds, "I'm American." (*Wings*, p. 186).

"I'm American" signifies a concentrated note of agony. Milly Theale's torments emerge out of the core of her being an American girl in the midst of a hostile, sordid and masked society. The conflict between the American heroine and English society is no longer on the surface or on an innocuous level of man-

<sup>28</sup> Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, intro. by R. P. Blackmur, (Dell-Laurel, New York, 1958), p. 187. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

ners as in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Here it is carried into the sombre arena of clashing social and moral values. It cuts a fissure into life itself; it reveals a sharp cleavage dividing humanity into disparate and hostile camps. It is a perennial clash of two traditions, cultures and patterns of life—one symbolized by the lone Milly Theale (in spite of the breathless glorification of Mrs. Stringham), and the other by an organized milieu represented by Kate Croy and Mrs. Lowder.

Milly Theale is revealed consistently through variations on the image of "the dove." The dove image is first used by Kate Croy for Milly Theale. In its imaginative and spiritual connotation it is the key of revelation to Milly Theale of her own soul and destiny, and it leads finally to the redemption of the relic of Merton Densher's conscience, touched by her death. In the forked ironical play with the image lies the exposure of multipronged motives and the labyrinths of the world that surrounds Milly Theale. The image of the "bejewelled dove" (*Wings*, p. 382), and the perversion of the image of the wings to suggest material ease, acquisition and social climbing, reveal the sordid and sinister intention and values of Kate Croy and Mrs. Lowder. The misappropriation of the sublime image by them is symbolic of the menace of rampant worldliness and shady motives.

Again the stage imagery dramatizes the cleavage. Milly Theale is presented as "the angular, pale princess, ostrich-plumed, blackrobed, hung about with amulets, reminders, relics" in a "Maeterlinck play" (*Wings*, p. 326); Mrs. Lowder is the stage producer, and Kate Croy a "distinguished actress" before the foot-lights, "with her wig, her paint, her jewels, every mark of her expression impeccable" (*Wings*, pp. 251-52). The natural purity and ethereal abstraction of Milly Theale are juxtaposed with the stage-manipulated, masked and varnished women of English society.

Milly's freedom from material involvement and economic necessity, and the consequent American situation, are extolled and synthesized into the princess image, with motivations ranging from the hero-worship of Mrs. Stringham to the cold-blooded greed of the English ladies. But it is significant that while Milly Theale cherishes the dove image and the romantic abstraction



conjured by the image of the princess and the stage-heroine, she feels almost paralyzed by the incubus of wealth around her that makes her a facile victim of intrigue. The possession of wealth instead of aiding, exposes her to new menace, making it almost impossible for her to seek fulfilment of the world she inhabits. Thus the area of conflict is carried more fully into her spirit, and the moral issue is intensified by her freedom from economic necessity.

Milly moves along with "a sort of mid-summer madness" and "straight skylark-flight of charity" (*Wings*, p. 164), so characteristic of her American character, and in consonance with the Minny Temple lineaments. Gradually as the intrigue around her deepens, she senses "the possibly sinister motive" (*Wings*, p. 125) and the dangers in Lancaster Gate, unnoticed in America: "In that way at least people were clearly quicker in England than at home; and Milly could quite see, after a little, how such instincts might become usual in a world in which dangers abounded. There were more dangers, clearly, round about Lancaster Gate than one suspected in New York or could dream of in Boston." (*Wings*, p. 146).

Here was "the world" that "as a consequence of the cold shoulder turned to it by the Pilgrim Fathers, had never yet boldly crossed to Boston." (*Wings*, p. 137). The awareness of the fatal dichotomy between the American girl and the English society grows upon Milly Theale, suggesting the image of a strange and dreadful monster, "calculated to devour the unwary, to abase the proud, to scandalise the good." (*Wings*, p. 211). "It might have been a lesson, for our young American, in the art of seeing things as they were." (*Wings*, p. 211).

Milly represents the unity and firmness of her "national character, that, in a woman who was young, made of the air breathed a virtual non-conductor." (*Wings*, p. 408). Her "New York tone," her own "native wood-notes" and her American facility and "reserves of spontaneity," emphasize the elements that make her the "last fine flower" of "old 'New York' stem." Milly's dilemma in English society brings to our minds what Henry James had said in 1870 about Minny Temple, "a plant of pure American growth," projected in "alien" England and English landscape.

*Two Heroines of Henry James*

The wheel has gone full circle for Milly. To Lord Mark she expresses the plain truth about her situation: "You're too much for me—too many. England bristles with questions." (*Wings*, p. 335). She stoically utters the words: "You won't see me suffer—don't be afraid. I shan't be a public nuisance." (*Wings*, p. 337). Sitting in "the gathering dusk of *her* personal world," she feels "the chill of the losing game" (*Wings*, p. 339)—intensifying the pathos of Minny Temple's words, "Patience, neighbor, now shuffle the cards."

The last glimpses of Milly Theale transport her image into timeless reality. She lives in the evocative world of "romance and art and history," claiming within the confinement the "freedom of all the centuries," almost blown in bliss "through space." (*Wings*, p. 351). In her heightened state of awareness of pain, Milly awakens into a timeless bliss. In her end she showed nothing but her beauty and strength (*Wings*, p. 459). Densher, who is redeemed, feels the wings of the dove and says, "They cover us." (*Wings*, p. 512).

Thus the American female originating from a personal symbol has, during her process of transmutation into the "steady realm of thought," not only assimilated and fused within her sharply defined ethnic traits and a personality pattern rooted in a living tradition, imbued with its inherent aesthetic moral and social values, but also, in her peak moments of the drama of consciousness, attained the immanence and universality of archetypal feminine experience. This is particularly true in the infructuous pursuit of freedom and happiness and the consequent self-torments and nemesis of Isabel Archer as the bearer "through the ages" of "the treasure of human affection" and more fully in the poignant inner flux of suffering and tragic disintegration of Milly Theale by hostile forces which transport her into the prismatic symbol of "the dove" and the "heir of all the ages." So Isabel Archer and Milly Theale represent the fulfilment and catharsis of the aesthetic process set in motion in 1870.



## ISABEL ARCHER AND HUCK FINN : TWO RESPONSES TO THE FRUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

RAJ K. KOHLI

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### I

THE LITERARY and cultural historians of America since the beginning of this century have been representing Mark Twain and Henry James as the idealized—and somewhat oversimplified—representatives of two great opposing forces in American civilization. In 1926, Parrington, in his classic study of American literature, summed up for his generation this antithesis by characterizing Mark Twain as the new American produced by the backwash of the frontier and describing Henry James as the American suffering from a deep nostalgia for a sentimentalized European past which existed nowhere except in the corridors of his own imagination. In Mark Twain, Parrington heard the voice of “an authentic American—a native writer thinking his own thoughts, using his own eyes, speaking his own dialect . . . the very embodiment of the turbulent frontier that had long been shaping a native psychology, and that now at last was turning eastward to Americanize the Atlantic seashore . . . an embodiment of three centuries of American experience—frontier centuries. decentralized, levelling, individualistic.” For Parrington, whose primary scale of value for judging the American artist was the latter’s relation to *reality* in America, Mark Twain had great value as “an immensely

significant American document... [and] a mirror reflecting the muddy cross-currents of American life, as the frontier spirit washed in, submerging the old aristocratic landmarks."<sup>1</sup> As Henry James fled his American reality and went on pilgrimage to "other shrines than that of his native land," he naturally went down in Parrington's scale and got a poor two-page dressing down at the hands of the liberal Jeffersonian scholar. Parrington lamented the fate of James when he perceived in his literary career the sad and strange irony that "one of our earliest realists, who was independent enough to break with the romantic tradition, should have fled from the *reality*, his art presumably would gird itself up to deal with ... [and] sought other lands, there to refine a meticulous technique and draw out ever thinner the substance of his art." Suffering the common fate of the *deracine*, he ended up as "a self-deceived romantic" lost in "a life-long pursuit of intangible realities that existed only in his imagination."<sup>2</sup>

Twenty-five years later, Henry Seidel Canby in his delightfully written parallel biography of the two writers, *Turn West, Turn East*, accentuated further the antithesis formulated by Parrington. For achieving the dramatic effects of parallelism and contrast in his portraiture, Canby did not hesitate to simplify and when necessary, even to distort the lineaments of his subjects. Stating his thesis in the introduction, Canby said with great confidence:

Of course the men were violently in contrast in temperament, in their art, in their strengths, in their weaknesses, and in their excesses... Neither would or could read the other. Everybody else read Twain and only the elite have as yet read Henry James. Mark was often offensively American. Henry shocked even his family by his patina... of Britishness.<sup>3</sup>

After some three hundred pages of critical-biographical study,

<sup>1</sup> Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York, 1959), pp. 86-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 239-41.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Seidel Canby, *Turn West, Turn East* (Boston, 1951), p. xii.

Canby came to the conclusion that Henry James and Mark Twain

are so valuable in American literature ... [because] they come from two very different Americas that are contemporary. Mark's frontier culture of the Mississippi is a young civilization. The East of Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, later James is no longer a young country. ... Mark's almost complete absence of an artistic conscience, except in language, his technique which is almost entirely oral, like a teller of tall tales or a balladist, are both aspects of cultural youth. Henry James, even in his own youth was not young in this respect, nor were his Eastern predecessors mentioned above. Even Walt Whitman, who thought of frontiersmen but lived in Brooklyn, labored over a conscious art of which Twain seemed incapable. ... The contrast is as great in the qualities of their work, *both in subject* and in art. ... Mark will live, I believe, chiefly by his best books, Henry James eventually most by his books as influence. ...<sup>4</sup>

Not content with reducing James from a writer to a mere influence, Canby delivered the Parthian shot by declaring pontifically:

No one of [James'] books has the survival value, in and by itself, of the great masters of life in representative portraits—Dickens, Shakespeare, and in his limited field, Twain.<sup>5</sup>

A year after Canby's biography, Marius Bewley, an American member of the *Scrutiny* group, postulated a great tradition for the classic American novel to which Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and James were admitted but Mark Twain was left way out on the frontier. Bewley discovered in his great four a complexity and depth which is possible only to an American who writes with his European past in his bones, and in their fiction he found the expression of "a mature criticism of life—mature and subtle

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

by the standards of the great European literature." Bewley deflated the "frontier colloquial tradition in American literature" by the simple process of ignoring it altogether, and Mark Twain, as the central pillar of this tradition, found no place in the pages of his book. In an introductory note of appreciation, F. R. Leavis gave complete endorsement to the Bewley formulation and emphasized how the Hawthorne-James line "represents a comparative inquiry, enacted in dramatic and poetic terms, into the criteria of civilization, and the possibilities." Leavis, however, did feel bothered by Bewley's unceremonious dismissal of Mark Twain and sought to re-admit him through the backdoor by finding in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* "the presence of a mature and full heritage of civilization . . . not bent towards a simplifying reduction of life . . . [but] . . . the complexity of ethical valuation in any society that has a complex tradition."<sup>6</sup> By rehabilitating Mark Twain on the strength of these two classics, Leavis performed a salvaging operation and rescued him from the reprobate company of Whitman, Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Hemingway—the simplicistic transmitters of the unworthy frontier tradition that seeks to reduce life to simplicity and never grows into the mature awareness of complexity or into the condition of serious moral discrimination.

To criticize the critics: even a casual look at the above formulations would point out to the perceptive that each of these scholars or critics has some particular concern or pre-occupation to which all else is subordinated. Parrington is interested primarily in what he considers to be reality in America—a reality that is external, observable, and verifiable in the empirical sense—and that is all he looks for in the text. Canby's interests lie more in the data of the artist's life—especially such

<sup>6</sup> Marius Bewley, *The Complex Fate* (London, 1952), pp. 1-4, vii-xiv. *The Complex Fate* was devoted primarily to an exploration of the literary relationship of Henry James to Hawthorne, and Bewley postulated his version of the great tradition of American fiction merely as an aside. This aside developed later into *The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel* (London, 1959) where the four novelists are studied exhaustively in the context of their tradition. The latter work also keeps up the earlier stance of silence towards Mark Twain.

data as can serve him for achieving dramatic effects and contrasts—and the text itself gets indeed a very short measure. A critic of the Leavis-Bewley variety who goes in quest of the great tradition has of necessity to work through exclusion, a process which implies in its very nature the accentuation of the least differentiate, for, otherwise, the lines cannot be drawn so clearly. What suffers most in these modes of critical approach is the integrity of the individual text which should be at the centre of literary study. In our particular case, if the critics had turned their attention to the text they would not have taken long to realize that both Mark Twain and Henry James shared much in common. One only has to juxtapose *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to see how these two writers are so much alike even though different.

The justification for choosing these two novels is very obvious. Both are masterpieces which their writers sought to perfect with a great deal of loving care. They are, at the same time, almost contemporaneous, for Mark Twain was working upon *Huckleberry Finn* through much the same years when James was writing *The Portrait*. Both, again, are novels of education which exploit the picaresque mode and use the archetypal journey to initiate the hero or the heroine into the ways of this world and to bring about his or her moral and intellectual growth. The central metaphor of each is the fruit of knowledge and the rhythm of their movement is dictated by alternating patterns of dream and disenchantment. The portraits of a girl grown into a lady and of a boy who matures into awareness, both novels describe the foray of innocence into the unknown world and how the encounter between innocence and experience brings not only great suffering but also wisdom and maturity.

II

Before launching their characters on the journey through the regions of darkness and evil, Mark Twain as well as Henry James take very conscious and deliberate care to emphasize their state of cloistered innocence and their curiosity to probe



the unknown. Still a girl in her teens when we meet her first, Isabel Archer is lost in a world of books and the memories of a happy childhood. Unacquainted with suffering, she has formed her own idealized vision of the actual world and of human life. When her fairy godmother came in the person of Mrs. Touchett, Isabel was reading in the security of her library which shut her off from the rest of the world and was blissfully unaware of evil—natural or moral.

A crude, cold rain fell heavily; the spring-time was indeed an appeal—and it seemed a cynical, insincere appeal—to patience. Isabel, however, gave as little heed as possible to cosmic treacheries.<sup>7</sup>

Possessing an intense faculty of *seeing without judging*, she was curious to explore strange places, to leave the past behind her and to begin afresh. Before leaving her native home, she reviewed to herself her past and remembered how till then

It had been a very happy life and she had been a very fortunate person. It appeared to Isabel that the unpleasant had been even too absent from her knowledge, for she had gathered from acquaintance with literature that it was often a source of interest and even of instruction.

She had a great desire for knowledge, an immense curiosity about life; but her source of information so far had only been her library. Her handsome and loving father, who was now dead, had great aversion to manifestations of the unpleasant and had also kept his daughter perfectly quarantined from them. Through training and education, he had instilled in her the gospel of "doing as one liked," and the girl had formed a faith in infinite possibilities.

This impression of cloistered innocence is reinforced further by the first conversation between Isabel and Ralph Touchett, when she asks him to show her the ghost.

<sup>7</sup> *The Portrait of a Lady* (Modern Library College Edition, 1960). All quotations from *The Portrait* are from this edition.

"The privilege is not given to every one; it's not enviable. It has never been seen by a young happy innocent person, like you. You must have suffered first, have suffered greatly, have gained some miserable knowledge. In that way your eyes are opened to it."

"I told you just now I'm very fond of knowledge," Isabel answered.

"Yes, of happy knowledge—of pleasant knowledge."

"It's not absolutely necessary to suffer; we were not made for that."

Henry James' own annotation that follows slightly later registers with deft touches his heroine's condition and completes the portrait of a hopeful innocent. Isabel believed that

It was almost unnecessary to cultivate doubt of one's self as to cultivate doubt of one's best friend. . . . The girl had a certain nobleness of imagination. . . . she spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity, she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of *brightness*, of *free expansion*, of *irresistible action* . . . she had seen very little of the evil of the world—her meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic. . . . It was one of her theories that Isabel Archer was very fortunate in being *independent* and that she sought to make some very enlightened use of that state. (Italics mine)

Huck Finn also, like his feminine cousin, lived in a state of simple innocence and had not been exposed to any evil greater than the false romanticism of Tom, acquired from the pirate-tales and the robber-books and Sir Walter Scott. He was, however, not affected materially by this exposure because the literalism of an innocent mind came to his rescue. "I got," as he tells us, "an old tin lamp and an iron ring, and went out in the woods and rubbed till I sweat like an Injun, calculating to build a palace and sell it: but it wasn't no use, none of the genie came. So then I judged that all that stuff was only just one of Tom Sawyer's lies. Reckoned he believed in the Arabs and elephants, but as for me I think different."

Till Tom Sawyer hunted up Huck in order to recruit him to his gang, Huck lived in the woods like a noble savage, "was free and satisfied," and "was just abiling with curiosity." He had heard some vague references to death but had not yet known what it meant nor thought that he himself would only too soon encounter it in the concrete. This natural evil was something unpleasant no doubt, but could be exercised by an act of the will. After supper, when Miss Watson would get out her book and

learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers, and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him, because I don't take no stock in dead people.<sup>8</sup>

In the woods of Huck or in the cloistered chamber of Isabel, it should be observed, evil was some remote unknown entity that belonged to a world other than their own. The keywords were *freedom, independence, self-reliance, happiness, and curiosity*. Into their idyllic world, the serpent made his first entry dressed in robes of gold. Both Mark Twain and Henry James had witnessed in the formulative years of their life the unashamed and brazen spectacle of the Gilded Age which had coarsened the moral fibre of the American people and subverted all higher values at the altar of acquisitiveness. It was quite natural for them, therefore, to choose money as a symbol of the dark forces that subject the happy innocence of our two characters to the scars and bruises of experience. The day Huck Finn came upon his fortune of three thousand dollars, he invited unknowingly his own ruin for "the Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me." The homeless waif who never had found love from any human being till then, not even from his own father, now became the subject of everyone's attention and was reduced to a pawn or a hostage by the conflicting parties that contended for the rights to his

<sup>8</sup> *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New American Library Signet Edition, 1960). All quotations from *Huckleberry Finn* are from this edition.

*Isabel Archer and Huck Finn*

possession. As the law trial kept grinding its slow course, Huck's Pap kidnapped his son to keep him prisoner on the Illinois shore in the woods while Widow Douglas sent a man to regain possession of Huck though the man was driven off by Pap's gun.

It is not Huck's prison alone that was made of the very golden bars he had inherited as a windfall. The cage in which Isabel found herself caught as a bird was also made of the same stuff. "The house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation," in which there was "neither light nor air," had become her dwelling simply because the fortune Mr. Touchett left her had invited the attention of the two of the most vulgar and unscrupulous adventurers in the person of Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond. They used her as a convenience for camouflaging an illicit love and provide a dowry for their daughter born out of wedlock. The realization that her fortune had been her undoing comes too late to Isabel, while Huck sells his to Judge Thatcher only to become the cause of the long-drawn trial during which Pap kidnaps him. The forces of the dark, once they have attached themselves to Isabel's or Huck's money, refuse to relent and pursue them like the Furies.

The greatest affront to innocence comes when the agencies of evil attempt to recruit it to their own causes and deny it the rights of personality. The most dreadful dilemmas of Huck confront him when slave-dealers, feudal southern aristocrats, or tricksters like the Duke and the King seek to use him as a tool and force him into actions against which his entire being is in revolt. This idea of the violation of human integrity in which an individual is reduced to the status of a mere tool or usable object, is put across in more definite terms by Isabel Archer in the famous Vigil Chapter where she broods on how Osmond "had thought at first he could change her, and she had done her best to be what he would like. But she was, after all, herself—she couldn't help that." Osmond, again, would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance. His egotism sought to destroy her freedom of doing as she liked and to impose on her a discipline of an authoritarian nature.

When she saw this rigid system close about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, [a] sense of darkness and suffocation . . . took possession of her; she seemed shut up with an odour of mould and decay . . . . The real offence, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his—attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park. . . . It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching.

Whatever the ordeals of Huck or Isabel, they never fail to preserve inviolate their individual integrity and this is what turns even their defeats into victories.

Though innocence in its encounter with experience gets bruised and scarred all through, it is never broken. On the contrary, trials and suffering strengthen it and arm it further with knowledge. Huck's innocence learns through repeated shocks the lessons of love, responsibility, human dignity, and sympathy, while Isabel gains the sad lucidity of wisdom and combines now the faculty of *judging* with that of *merely seeing*. In the failure of evil to corrode their moral fibre or to pervert their innocence lies its very defeat; and we fear less for our innocents now, as we are sure that the knowledge that they have earned is not going to leave them so weak and helpless.

Though these major works of Henry James and Mark Twain share the same theme, the variations they weave into it—like figures in a carpet—are quite different. While *Huckleberry Finn* is characterized by a pattern of repeated imprisonments and escapes, *The Portrait* unfolds the stages of a long-drawn process whereby a free person ends into a state of imprisonment from which there is no escape. The entire movement of Mark Twain's novel is from bondage towards freedom, whereas Henry James portrays the reverse of this movement. Both Huck Finn and Isabel Archer, in their long encounter, have tasted the fruit of knowledge but their responses are not the same. The last words of Huck Finn carry in them a message that asserts the victory of Freedom over Fate.

But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize

me, and I can't stand it. I been there before.

The last sentence but one spoken by Isabel Archer in *The Portrait* suggests the limits of Freedom to a Caspar Goodwood who even in the despair of his hopeless love refuses to give up and submit to Fate.

"You must save what you can of your life; you mustn't lose it all simply because you've lost a part. . . . *We can do absolutely as we please*, to whom under the sun do we owe anything? *What is it that holds us. . . . The world's all before us—and the world's very big.* I know something about that."

Isabel gave a long murmur, like a creature in pain, it was as if he were pressing something that hurt her. "*The World's very small*," she said. . . (Italics mine)

In these last words of theirs, Huck and Isabel not only offer us their opposing responses to the fruit of knowledge, but also sum up the entire spirit of the works of which they form the centre. *Huckleberry Finn* is a long prose-poem celebrating Freedom, an ode to Possibility, while *The Portrait* embraces the elegiac mode, lamenting in muted tones over Limit and Fate.<sup>9</sup> Mark Twain and Henry James, thus, contain within themselves the "yes" and "no" of their shared cultural heritage which in the nineteenth century had sought to express and define itself in terms of a debate in which key terms were Innocence, Experience, Freedom, and Fate.

Read in the light of all that has been stated or suggested above, the controversy over the arbitrary endings of both the novels seems to be futile. Since the dreadful dilemmas of exis-

<sup>9</sup> It is not just a coincidence that while the patterns of imagery in *Huckleberry Finn* are analogues of vastness of space, those in *The Portrait* suggest cramping and confinement. The unending river with its oceanic expanse, the ever-widening woods, the vast plains and the open starlit sky release a set of images which function poetically to make Mark Twain's novel an epic of freedom. The lament over limit in *The Portrait* derives its quality and tone from image-clusters associated with bolted doors, walled chambers, drawn shutters, bars, gates, fences, cages, closed windows, and enclosed plots. Henry James is no less a poet than Mark Twain in the use of imagery.

tence do not cease merely when a person has acquired the gift of knowledge or moral and intellectual awareness, the stories of Huck Finn and Isabel Archer must have of necessity an arbitrary ending. Whole years lie ahead of the matured Isabel, and there is a vast territory before Huck. Both are still young, after all, and a great many things might yet happen to them.

## OUT OF SEASON FOR NIRVANA : HENRY ADAMS AND BUDDHISM

EUSEBIO L. RODRIGUES

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IN JUNE 1886 Henry Adams, en route to Japan, wrote in a light-hearted vein to his friend, John Hay, describing his journey with La Farge from New York to San Francisco. La Farge attempted sketches of the landscape while Adams read Buddhism and slept. The journey was uneventful except for a strange incident at Omaha. Here, wrote Adams, "a young reporter got the better of us—for when in reply to his enquiry as to our purpose in visiting Japan, La Farge beamed through his spectacles the answer that we were in search of Nirvana, the youth looked up like a meteor and rejoined: It's out of season!" This unexpected comment lodged like a burr in La Farge's memory for as late as in 1897 in the dedication of *An Artist's Letters from Japan* to Henry Adams he wrote: "If only we had found Nirvana—but he was right who warned us that we were late in this season of the world."<sup>1</sup>

The incident was indeed trivial but it can be looked upon as a Joycean "epiphany," an instant "revelation of the whatness of a thing," pregnant with symbolic significance. For it vividly crystallizes the aura and temper of the oriental influence that prevailed during the Indian Summer of New England. It also provides us with a focal point from which to view the gradual growth of Henry Adams' interest in Buddhism, to watch his

<sup>1</sup> Worthington C. Ford, *Letters of Henry Adams 1858-1891* (Boston 1930). (Hereafter abbreviated to Ford I.)



reactions to it as manifest in the poem he wrote in 1891, "Buddha and Brahma," and finally to consider the fluctuations and ambiguities of his responses to it in relation to his attitude to life.

The extent of oriental influence on American writing and art all through the nineteenth century has yet to be charted. Arthur Christy in *The Orient in American Transcendentalism* (1932) has indeed surveyed and recorded the oriental influences on Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott. But the contours of orientalism on the American literary map of the latter half of the nineteenth century have yet to be traced and its impact on Henry Adams and his contemporaries has still to be evaluated.

The earlier half of the nineteenth century was, relatively speaking, a period of hope and belief, an age of faith which reached its height in the Emersonian concord. The last four decades witnessed a gradual change in the intellectual climate, vividly recorded for us in *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918). The impact of Darwinism and the formidable challenge of modern science shattered the religious assumptions of the time and undermined the older belief that the human was somehow in touch with the divine. Disillusionment was in the air and there was a sense of failure all around, an awareness of coming dissolution.

Attempts at harmony and synthesis were indeed made in this period and solutions to some of the problems were offered by individuals like William James who, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), tried to solve the conflict between faith and science by positing that faith could always supply the necessary equilibrium and a genuine emotional satisfaction for the individual. None of the solutions offered was adequate or completely acceptable. One solution was a return to the Orient, a turning to Buddhism, for an answer to man's existential plight. On the swirling sea of intellectual chaos and confusion the oil of Buddhism was poured from time to time and this provided enisled patches of temporary peace and comfort for some restless minds.

The period from 1860 to 1900 witnessed a gradual, steadily increasing interest in Buddhism and its teachings among American intellectuals and artists. The avenue of approach was through

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art and aesthetics rather than through philosophy and metaphysics. In 1876 the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia initiated a great deal of interest in Japanese art, an interest which had already been stimulated by La Farge, who had written on Japanese art in 1869<sup>2</sup> and by Edward E. Morse, a renowned collector of Japanese pottery, culminating in the establishment of a department of Japanese art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in July 1889. This interest in Japanese art, an interest evoked by Buddhism, gradually established, like incense in a temple, the proper mood and atmosphere for the introduction of Buddhism in America.

The interest in Buddhism spread like wildfire in America in 1879 with the publication of Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, which, according to Arthur Christy, was reported to have gone into eighty editions in America.<sup>3</sup> Its appeal to disillusioned New Englanders is easily understandable, for this poem, a kind of epic, described the life and precepts of Gautama Buddha, a prince who had not only wrestled with and conquered evil but taught his followers the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold Path to salvation. The solution offered by the Buddha was practical rather than metaphysical and had an instant impact on the disillusioned of the time.

During this period a number of journals featured articles on oriental religion. A Chicago monthly, *The Open Court*, established in 1887, hailed the Parliament of All Religions held at the World Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893. Swami Vivekananda, the Indian mystic, was the centre of attraction during the Parliament and was tremendously popular in America.<sup>4</sup> In the winter of 1895-96 there appeared a magazine with the rather significant name, *The Lotos*,<sup>5</sup> whose editorial slant was determined by Fenollosa, who insisted in his articles that the East "had come to stay." It was Fenollosa who in 1892 read before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard a poem titled "East and West," a poem completely impregnated with Bud-

<sup>2</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, *Fenollosa and His Circle* (New York, 1962), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur E. Christy, *The Asian Legacy and American Life* (New York, 1945), p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Romain Rolland, *Prophets of the New India*.

<sup>5</sup> Its older name was *New Cycle*.

dhist ideas and images.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, so pervasive was Buddhism in America in the nineties that a newspaper correspondent in 1894 stated firmly that Buddha was a name "to conjure with" and added that "the term 'American Buddhist' is not an uncommon one at date."<sup>7</sup> And Lafcadio Hearn, commenting on a new edition of *The Light of Asia* in 1883 wrote: "After all, Buddhism in some esoteric form may prove the religion of the future. . . . What are the heavens of all Christian fancies after all but Nirvana,—extinction of individuality in the eternal."<sup>8</sup>

Christy makes an interesting distinction between the two orientalisms that prevailed in nineteenth-century America. The earliest orientalism, according to him, centred on the Vedanta and the Transcendentalists, who relied chiefly on *The Bhagavad Gita*, "sought an ethic and therapeutically useful religious philosophy."<sup>9</sup> Henry Adams and his contemporaries read the books of the Buddhists to help them in their search for peace and solace. One of their favourite words was "Nirvana," which can be roughly translated as "peace." One gets the feeling that the later oriental phase was escapist in tendency. This feeling is confirmed when one reads the following lines to a Japanese priest-painter from "East and West" by Fenollosa, who became a Buddhist in the eighties:

I've flown from my West  
Like a desolate bird from a broken nest  
To learn thy secret of joy and rest.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Bigelow, another Buddhist convert who lectured on Buddhism at Harvard, defined Nirvana thus in *Buddhism and Immortality*: "There alone is peace, that peace which the material world cannot give, the peace which passeth understanding trained on material things—infinite and eternal peace, the peace of

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven, 1963), pp. 96-100.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams: The Middle Years* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958) p. 472.

<sup>9</sup> Christy, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted, Brooks, p. 50.

limitless consciousness unified with limitless. That peace is Nirvana."<sup>11</sup>

Henry Adams, unlike most of his contemporaries, never did surrender himself completely to Buddhism. His restless, self-analytic mind, with irony flickering gaily on its surface, distrusted every neat solution offered to it. It is quite impossible today in 1966 to document the gradual rise of Adams' interest in Buddhism, for he destroyed all his pre-1885 private correspondence, and the Henry Adams letters that escaped destruction have yet to be published. Adams apparently had in his possession a number of books on oriental philosophy and religion. Ernest Samuels maintains that by 1891 Adams had a wide knowledge of Buddhism and Indian philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Only two published letters before 1885 testify to Adams' awareness of Buddhism. An 1875 letter to Charles Milnes Gaskell states: "One year resembles another and if it weren't for occasional disturbing dreams of decay, disaster or collapse, I should consider myself as having attained as much of Nirwana [sic] as a man of my race and temperament can expect to do."<sup>13</sup> An 1879 letter implies that the opposite of Nirvana is annihilation.<sup>14</sup>

December 6, 1885, is a crucial date for anyone who seeks to pluck out the heart of the mystery that is Henry Adams and also for one who wants to understand the secret of his attraction to Buddhism. On that day his wife committed suicide. The event so smashed up his being that his later life can be seen as a con-

<sup>11</sup> Quoted, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams: The Major Phase* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 600. (Hereafter abbreviated to *The Major Phase*.) "Adams had already read a good deal about oriental religions. He owned William W. Rockhill's *Buddha* and Emerson Tennent's *Ceylon*, and of course made use of Murray, *Handbook for Travellers in India*. He also owned such works as P. Raynaud, *Materials on Indian Philosophy* (1876); James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*; Charles Acland, *A Popular Account of the Manners and Customs of India* (1847); John Mann, *History of Indian Literature* (1878); J. Muir, *Metrical Translation from Sanskrit Writers* (1879); E. B. Crowell, *The Sarva-Darsana Samgraha* (Systems of Indian Philosophy) (1882); A. Gough, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*; S. Johnson, *Oriental Religions* (1879).

<sup>13</sup> Harold Dean Cater, *Henry Adams and his Friends*, compiled, with a biographical introduction (Boston, 1947), p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

tinual attempt to recover the unity of thought and action that was irreparably destroyed on that day. Very few letters of the period immediately after his wife's death that have survived let us into the chaos and suffering in Adams' soul. Ten days after his wife's death he wrote a letter that states "that life could have no experience so crushing," "that fate at last has smashed the life out of me," that "the torture has made me groan." But stoically he maintains: "I shall try not to complain."<sup>15</sup> Sixteen years later, recalling the impact of his wife's death in a letter to Clara Hay, he wrote: "I never did get up again and never to this moment recovered the energy or interest to return to active life."<sup>16</sup>

Silence and stoicism were two ways of facing this challenge. Another way was travel which, according to Ernest Samuels, was a course in comparative religion.<sup>17</sup> And, according to his niece, Mabel La Farge, Adams "plunged into a life of restlessness and travel, of searchings and questionings, and of intense loneliness."<sup>18</sup> Adams made two journeys to the East in 1886 and in 1890. He visited Japan and Ceylon in the company of John La Farge, an ardent devotee of Buddhist art. It must have been during these years that Adams was greatly attracted to Buddhism and to the Nirvana it offered. In a letter to Timothy F. Dwight in August 1886 Adams wrote: "Japan has the single advantage of being a lazy place. One feels no impulse to exert oneself, and Buddhist contemplation of the infinite seems the only natural mode of life. Energy is a dream of raw youth."<sup>19</sup> A number of his friends like La Farge and W. S. Bigelow were deeply involved in Buddhism. Another friend, W. W. Rockhill, sent him his book, *Life of the Buddha*, and Adams replied to him in March 1890 thanking him for it.<sup>20</sup>

Out of Adams' preoccupation with Buddhism and his reading in oriental philosophy and religion there emerged a poem, "Buddha and Brahma," which he wrote in 1891 but did not

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 516.

<sup>17</sup> *The Major Phase*, p. 295.

<sup>18</sup> Mabel La Farge, *Letters to a Niece* (Boston, 1920), p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Cater, p. 168.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

publish till 1915. It appeared in the *Yale Review*<sup>21</sup> with this prefatory letter:

To John Hay

26 April, 1895

My dear John,

Once La Farge and I, on our rambles, stopped for an hour to meditate under the sacred Bo-tree of Buddha in the ruined and deserted city of Anuradapura [sic] in the jungle of Ceylon; and, then, resuming our course, we presently found ourselves on the quiet bosom of the Indian Ocean. Perhaps I was a little bored by the calm of the tropical sea, or perhaps it was the greater calm of Buddha that bored me.

At all events I amused a tedious day or two by jotting down in a notebook the lines which you profess to want. They are yours. Do not let them go further.

Ever affectionately,  
HENRY ADAMS

"Buddha and Brahma" is significant for a number of reasons. First, it is a poem in its own right, interesting to read. Secondly, it provides us with an "objective correlative" of the conflict between thought and action and the need to choose between the two that was troubling the mind of Henry Adams at the time. And finally, it provides us with a clue to Adams' attitude to life, his ceaseless search for unity which informs and shapes his later writings.

A knowledge of the circumstances in which "Buddha and Brahma" was composed is essential for a complete understanding of its significance. The prefatory letter explains that the poem was occasioned by boredom, but this has to be discounted as a piece of ironic Adamsian depreciation. He was, indeed, disappointed with Anuradhapura, the holy centre of Buddhism in Ceylon in times past. He sat down to meditate under the sacred Bo-tree, hoping to attain Nirvana. What happened there

<sup>21</sup> V (October 1915), pp. 82-9.

is not quite certain and the letters he wrote about his experience there reveal Adams' tendency to make use of healthy ambiguous irony. To Elizabeth Cameron he wrote that he sat there, "for a half-hour, hoping to attain Nirvana. . . . I left the Bo-tree without attaining Buddhaship."<sup>22</sup> Adams elaborated on his experiences in Anuradhapura to his niece, Mabel La Farge:

. . . . to me the only interesting remains in the place were not Buddhist at all, but a very old rock temple of Brahma where the artists had made some really well-felt attempts to please and honor their favorite deity Siva—either him or some other incarnation, I think it matters very little what. I regret to say that artistically, in Ceylon, unlike Japan, Buddha is a bore; and a big one. More than that he always was a bore. Don't tell W.S.B.!!! Still Anuradapura is quite a place to have seen; and I was glad to sit for an hour under Buddha's Bo-tree and attain Perfection as he did—though La Farge who is very severe on me says I didn't. Anyway we sat there, under the tree which is twenty-three hundred years old; and pretty sad, sordid, and miserable is the outlook from that special standpoint of human perfectibility.<sup>23</sup>

More significant than Adams' experience under the Bo-tree was the book on religion which he read in Ceylon, one that surely triggered off the poem. There is strong evidence to prove that the book Adams read was F. Max Muller's *Natural Religion* (1889). In a letter to Elizabeth Cameron Adams wrote: "In all Ceylon I cannot buy or beg a book on the Ceylon art, literature, religion or history. Of all that has been published on India, not even a stray volume of Max Muller have I seen here except in the little library of the Sacred Tooth. . . ." <sup>24</sup> Ernest Samuels hesitatingly states that *Natural Religion* was probably the book Adams read in Ceylon. Internal evidence, however, offers indubitable proof that this was definitely the book that set Adams thinking about the problem voiced in the poem.

<sup>22</sup> *The Major Phase*, p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> Mabel La Farge, pp. 61-2.

<sup>24</sup> Ford I, p. 524.

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In his book Max Muller sought to define natural religion. He examined the inadequacy of former definitions of religion especially in relation to Buddhism, which does not postulate the existence of a Deity or a Creator. He focussed attention on an incident in the *Milinda Panha*, where a disciple of the Buddha, Malunkya, seeks answers to metaphysical problems, as "whether the world is eternal or had a beginning, whether Buddha and those who like him have arrived at perfect knowledge, will live after death or not? Whether the living soul is identical with the body or not?"<sup>25</sup> Buddha counters by asking what one would do in the case of a man wounded by a poisoned arrow; would the knowledge about who shot the arrow be more important than the treatment of the wound? Thus Buddha showed in a parable that metaphysical speculation is futile. According to Max Muller, "Buddha does not imply that he could not have answered these questions or revealed these mysteries if he had chosen. He professes the same philosophical abstinence ... or agnosticism, as it is now called, as Socrates."<sup>26</sup> The metaphysical riddle posed in "Buddha and Brahma" clearly has its origin in the question put by Malunkya, though the solution offered is non-Buddhist. Adams, however, may have brooded over the definition offered by Max Muller towards the end of his book: "Religion consists in perception of the infinite *under such manifestations as are able to influence the moral character of man.*"<sup>27</sup>

"Buddha and Brahma" is a philosophical poem in three clear-cut sections. In the first section of thirty-five lines Buddha, having attained perfection, his eyes fixed on a lotus in his hand, meditates with his disciples around him. Afraid lest the Buddha leave them without solving some metaphysical doubts, one of his disciples, Malunkya, requests him to explain whether the world was eternal or not. Twice he asks the question and twice the Buddha makes no answer. The third time, however, the Buddha replies with an almost imperceptible mystic and mysterious sign. He raises the lotus in his hand and looks fixedly upon it and then allows his hand to drop to its former rest. The dis-

<sup>25</sup> Max Muller, *Natural Religion* (London, 1889), p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.



ciples are perplexed and one of them, the youngest, decides to ask his father, "the wisest man of all men in the world," to translate for him the significance of the Buddha's gesture. His father, the Rajah of Mogadha, who had been undisturbed when his son had left him to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha, tries to brush aside the question, telling him that their teachings are not the same. The duty of the young is to act, not think. The young man persists in knowing the path to wisdom and his father offers him three cryptic words of wisdom: "Think not! Strike."

The rest of the poem is a long monologue by the Rajah which solves the mystery posed by the gesture of the Buddha and explains the three words of advice offered to the young man. The Buddha gesture is interpreted in terms of the three words of wisdom and the way of the Buddha is ultimately discovered to be the same as the way of Brahma. The Rajah recalls the time when both he and Buddha sought a way out of the jungle of *samsar* (the world). Buddha sacrificed the act of living in this world as in it and of it, took the path of renunciation, of meditation, and attained the Perfect Life. He himself, however, did not abandon Kshatriyadom, the life of the warrior. For the good of his people he used his sword to do battle and did not step down from the throne: he did his duty. And now, he continued, even though Buddha has reached the End and he himself is still caught in *samsar*, even though they are poles apart, the truth is: The Starting-point must be the End-point too! For the Veda teaches that:

... Brahma is Beginning, Middle, End,  
Matter and Mind, Time, Space, Form, Life and Death.  
The Universal has no limit. Thought  
Travelling in constant circles, round and round,  
Must ever pass through endless contradictions,  
Returning on itself at last, till lost  
In silence.

The paths to Brahma may be different but all lead to one end—"a perfect union with the single Spirit." The way of the Buddha is through silence and absorption. The other way, that of the

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Rajah, is more strenuous, more demanding:

But we, who cannot fly the world, must seek  
To live two separate lives; one, in the world  
Which we must ever seem to treat as real;  
The other in ourselves, behind a veil  
Not to be raised without disturbing both.

This is the way of action, of duty, and may involve the Rajah in killing. But in doing so he has to realize that he is merely "an instrument of Brahma." Amidst this life of corruption, in this world of selfishness and of striving, the man of action has to be also aware of the Perfect Life, but his awareness of it has to be behind the veil of silence.

Both paths meet in "Brahma—the only Truth." And the poem ends with the Rajah's realization that the gesture of the Buddha was a message not only to his disciples but also to him:

Gautama tells me my way too is good;  
Life, Time, Space, Thought, the World, the Universe  
End where they first begin, in one sole Thought  
Of Purity in Silence.

"Buddha and Brahma" consists of 232 lines of blank verse pitched deliberately on a low key as befitting a meditation. Even the narrative element is held in control to achieve the feel of slow steady movement. Adams' handling of blank verse reveals his sure control of his theme. Though a number of lines are end-stopped, a measure of flexibility is introduced by adding an extra syllable to some lines and also by varying the caesural pause. At times Adams makes use of two parallel lines for the purpose of balance:

Some hope or danger in the Noble Way,  
Some guide or warning to the Perfect Life.

The long monologue of the Rajah, which presents the central issue, is animated by a certain quickening movement throughout

and reaches a climax in the lines which present the Rajah's dilemma. And then gradually the tempo slows down till the poem drops into silence on a half-line. Adams was unerringly right in choosing to dramatise his thoughts and feelings in verse form: this enabled him to avoid abstraction and to concretise and project his ideas about human existence in human terms.

It is interesting to speculate about from where Adams derived the two solutions he offers us in this poem. The Buddhist solution, of course, came to him from his readings in Buddhism and from Max Muller: it was a ready-made, conventional, solution which a number of his friends, like William Sturgis Bigelow, had accepted, one that was very popular at the time. The second solution, that of the Rajah, according to Ernest Samuels, is not the Hindu solution but a personal one: "He could not fly the jungle of world or self. His only recourse lay in the double existence of the Rajah whom Adams created in his image."<sup>28</sup> Ernest Samuels is right in that the Rajah's attitude is a perfect "objective correlative" to the attitude of Adams at the time. But it is very significant and revealing that this attitude to life is also to be found in the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the most well-known and popular of Indian religious books and one of the key-books of the Transcendentalists. There is no evidence as to when and where Adams read the *Bhagavad Gita* but there is strong reason to suppose that he *must* have been familiar with it before he composed "Buddha and Brahma." The *Bhagavad Gita*, literally the Song Divine, prescribes different paths to Brahman: the ways of knowledge, of devotion, and of work. *Karma Yoga*, or the way of action, of work, accepts man's historical predicament, his existential condition. According to the *Bhagavad Gita* this world is not an illusion but a manifestation of God and exists to fulfil his purpose. It is "the arena of God's action" and it is by action that man can fulfil God's purpose in this world. Therefore, says the *Gita*,

Perform every action with your heart fixed on the Supreme Lord. Renounce attachment to the fruits. Be even-tempered in success and failure; for it is this evenness of temper which

<sup>28</sup> *The Major Phase*, p. 63.

is meant by yoga.

Work done with anxiety about results is far inferior to work done without such anxiety, in the calm of self-surrender. Seek refuge in the knowledge of Brahman (The Godhead). They who work selfishly for results are miserable.

In the calm of self-surrender you can free yourself from the bondage of virtue and vice during this very life. Devote yourself, therefore, to reaching union with Brahman. To unite the heart to Brahman and then to act: that is the secret of non-attached work. In the calm of self-surrender the seers renounce the fruits of their actions, and so reach enlightenment. Then they are free from the bondage of rebirth, and pass to that state which is beyond all evil.<sup>29</sup>

It goes on to elaborate still further:

What is action? What is inaction? Even the wise are puzzled by this question. Therefore, I will tell you what action is. When you know that, you will be free from all impurity. You must learn what kind of work to do, what kind of work to avoid, and how to reach a state of calm detachment from your work. The real nature of action is hard to understand.

He who sees the inaction that is in action, and the action that is in the inaction, is wise indeed. Even when he is engaged in action he remains poised in the tranquillity of the Atman.<sup>30</sup>

And the Atman is identical with the Brahman.<sup>30</sup>

The *Gita* thus calls for disinterested selfless action, uncorrupted by desire for the fruits of action. The man of action participates in God's purpose, dedicates all action to God, helps in the stability, solidarity and progress of society and ultimately attains Brahman. Such a man is Adams' Rajah, who chose the path of action, not the paths of knowledge and meditation. He had to do his duty—fight with his sword to protect his people and

<sup>29</sup> *The Bhagavad Gita*. Translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (New York, 1954), pp. 40-1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 51-3.

to maintain the hierarchy of caste. And yet he is aware that he is but "an instrument of Brahma," and is content to live two lives, one in the world, the other in himself, "deeply sunk in silence."

"Buddha and Brahma" is significant not merely as a poem but as a personal testament. Adams expresses in this poem—which he was most reluctant to publish—the two ways in which he could face the future, the two modes of existence that were possible for him. Though the poem insists on the greater heroism of the Rajah's solution, Adams, as his letters reveal, did not accept it for himself but took refuge in a Buddhist-Stoic stance of silence. Adams' letters register the fluctuations in his interest in Buddhism. Its appeal to him was strong but he resented an easy surrender to it. In June 1889 he wrote a letter criticizing his friend, W. Sturgis Bigelow, who accepted unquestioningly the Buddhist solution:

Our conclusions are too far apart. Sturgis is like everyone else bound to find Paradise in this world, and seems to be in dead earnest. Thousands and millions of men have taken his road before, with more or less satisfaction, but the mass of mankind have settled to the conviction that the only Paradise possible in this world is concentrated in the three little words which the *ewig* man says to the *ewige* woman. Sturgis calls this the Fireside and thinks he knows better. He looks for his Paradise in absorption in the Infinite. Possibly the result will be the same. Sooner or later, fate commonly gets bored by the restless man who requires Paradise, and sets its foot on him with so much energy that he curls up and never wriggles again. When Sturgis can't squirm any longer, and suddenly realizes that Paradise is a dream, and the dream over, I fear that he is too sensitive a nature to stand the shock and perhaps it wouldn't be worth his while to try.<sup>31</sup>

One finds Adams gradually believing, as time goes on, in a mystique of silence, which is as much Buddhist as it is Stoic. An 1885 letter to Brooks Adams hails silence as "the only sen-

<sup>31</sup> Ford I, p. 400.

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sible form of expression." All action is futile; only silence has any meaning :

I have deliberately and systematically effaced myself, even in my own history . . . . I look on our society as a balloon, liable to momentary collapse and I see nothing to be gained by sticking pins through the oil-canvas. I do not care to monkey with a dynamo. If you choose to do it, well and good! I never try to stop any man from doing anything—or woman either. They act as Brahma wills and I not less so. By all means work out your full destiny, but work it out alone. My destiny—or at least my will—as an element of the social mass in movement—lies in silence, which I hold to be alone sense.<sup>32</sup>

In 1901 Adams, in a letter to H. O. Taylor, insists that annihilation of self is required before Nirvana can be attained. He compares the Christian mystical solution with the Buddhist one and prefers the latter:

A charming study is the comparison of St. Bernard with St. Francis, and if you take in Saint Dominic, *tant mieux!* Yet I cannot understand them as I seem to understand Buddha. The annihilation or absorption of self is a more oriental faculty. Sometimes I suspect that the western ascetic could get at it only by second-hand, and that what in the oriental was naturally a direct absorption in the absolute could be in the westerner only direct absorption in Christ.<sup>33</sup>

By 1903 Adams reaches a stage where all action is unendurable: "I shrink from a tragedy or an effort," he wrote to George Cabot Lodge, "I loathe the strenuous life. I've had more than enough of analysis and synthesis."<sup>34</sup> By 1905 silence becomes almost a religion: "I believe God to be silence."<sup>35</sup> He devotes a chapter to silence in his *Education*. And in 1910

<sup>32</sup> Worthington C. Ford, *Letters of Henry Adams, 1892-1918* (Boston, 1938), p. 68. (Hereafter abbreviated to Ford II.)

<sup>33</sup> Cater, p. 510.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 541.

<sup>35</sup> Ford II, p. 445.

Adams is of the opinion that even the action involved in writing is harmful: "Clearly I can only do harm by teaching my own views of history and society. All the world is scared and pessimistic and tending to suicide without my help." The letter ends with an absolute renunciation of action: "It is imbecile! I can think of nothing but silence and seclusion to escape the dilemma. Action of any kind whatsoever only hastens the acceleration."<sup>36</sup>

Buddhism thus is of crucial importance for our understanding of the character and temperament of Henry Adams and of his attitude to life and action. It is true that he was also attracted by the Stoic solution, for a 1915 letter states that Marcus Aurelius was for him "the type of highest human attainment."<sup>37</sup> And, of course, one must never forget that the Virgin became for him a symbol and a source of unity. Buddhism, the way to the Perfect Life, did provide Adams with a sense of direction even though he never committed himself to it.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted, *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Cater, p. 769.

## UNDERSTANDING *FOUR QUARTETS*

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

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ALTHOUGH FIRST published in book form only in 1943, three of the four poems that make the *Four Quartets* sequence had appeared earlier during the War—*East Coker* in 1940, *The Dry Salvages* in 1941, and *Little Gidding* in 1942—each, in John Lehmann's words, "as exciting to many of us as news of a great victory." *Burnt Norton*, the first of the Quartets, had been indited earlier, and included in *Collected Poems: 1909-1935*, published in 1936. In the summer of 1934, Eliot had stayed at 'Chipping Camden in Gloucestershire, and first come in contact with the neighbouring country house 'Burnt Norton', and written the poem soon afterwards. Already Hitler and the Nazis were firmly entrenched in power in Germany, and the spectre of a second world war was seen lifting its head in the dim far horizon. With writers like E. M. Forster and T. S. Eliot, silence or seeming passivity was as significant as fresh creation, and the long silence between *Burnt Norton* and the three later Quartets, and the shorter silences between *East Coker* and *The Dry Salvages*, and the *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding*, were rather in the nature of commentaries on the poems themselves. Although their composition was thus spread over seven or eight years, the four Quartets are nevertheless to be viewed as a unity. While reviewing *The Dry Salvages*, the third of the Quartets, on its appearance, F. R. Leavis wrote: "The sequence is to be a real whole; a total context which each constituent poem needs for its full significance." The passage from the



thirties to the early forties was in the nature of an exploration of Inferno and an ascent of the Hill of Purgation, and this is part of the total context. The developing situation in Europe and the world over, consequent on the rise of Communism, Fascism, Nazism, and leonine militarism, tended to corrode human values and man's feeling for religion, history, art and literature, and his attitude towards science, society, civilisation and even language suffered different kinds of erosion or perversion. The true poet—an Aurobindo in India, an Eliot in England—was in effect a Tiresias bearing a burden that he could neither evade nor lighten:

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,  
 Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see  
 At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives  
 Homeward ...

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs  
 Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—.

Sri Aurobindo worked on *Savitri*, and Eliot wrote his *Four Quartets*. Sri Aurobindo made draft after draft, raising the poem thereby to an adequate level of poetic articulation. Eliot likewise experienced "the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings." Since its definitive publication in 1943, *Four Quartets* has been subjected to continued high-pressure exegesis and comment; nevertheless, it remains absorbingly, fascinatingly, tantalisingly obscure. Grover Smith, J., writes in his valuable study, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning*:

In the one multiplex pattern of the *Quartets*, history, art, love, and faith find a common ordering; the central problem, as now conceived, was always theodicy. Eliot has sought to indicate the ways of God to man.

So did Dante, and so did Milton. But the "ways" are far from clear. There is the way down, and there is the way up, and there is the way that is neither up nor down—no "way" at all,

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but only a point of intersection, a moment of stillness that is everything and nothing, that is all time and eternity. When the intellect fails, the heart must respond: one has to be a *sahridaya* to pluck the heart of the mystery of poetic inspiration and articulation. When that fails, all our talking about and about can do little to advance our understanding.

Neither the individual titles of the poems nor the collective title, *Four Quartets*, gives us any immediate gate-pass to the poetic universe structured by Eliot. It was an accident that made Eliot come in contact with Burnt Norton, and especially its garden which seems to have set him thinking, image-building, and looking before and after. Genesius Jones says in a footnote to his book (*Approach to the Purpose*, 1964): "There is possibly a play here on the meaning of 'burnt'. It is a Gaelic prefix signifying cyclic motion; and in English it means 'consumed by fire'". The "burnt" country-house and the garden could be symbolic of past, present and future somehow enacting co-existence, in cyclical or even absolute terms. Wasn't the House of Western Civilization itself an extended "Burnt Norton" sprawled across the vistas of the poet's imagination? The next title "East Coker" derives from the village of East Coker, the Somerset home from where Eliot's ancestors had migrated to America three hundred years ago, and the third, "The Dry Salvages," from "a small group of rocks, with a beacon, off the N. E. coast of Sape Ann, Massachusetts." From Somerset to Massachusetts, from the Old World to the New, and then back to England—for Eliot came to England, remained in England, and after briefly revisiting America in the early thirties became a naturalised Briton, an avowed "Anglo-Catholic" in religion, monarchist in politics, and classicist in literature. From the casualness of the encounter with "Burnt Norton", from the rather more purposeful encounters or re-encounters with "East Coker" and "The Dry Salvages", Eliot proceeds to "Little Gidding", a place with a history of its own. For it was the village that served in the second half of the seventeenth century as the home of nightly vigils for a religious community that included the Saint Nicholas Ferrar and the "metaphysical" poet, Richard Crashaw, but here the context transcends the casual and the personal, the geographical and the temporal, and is gathered

into the universal and the timeless, and is spelt out in terms of "the mystical mathematics of the City of Heaven." The place-names have thus become a chain of images linking the local and the personal with the general and the universal, and these could be read as symbols, open-sesames that start and sustain a process of inquiry that embraces in course of time the *self* and the SELF, the many and the One, time and Eternity, appearance and Reality, innocence and Experience, contrariety and Unity, darkness and Light, vacancy and Plenitude, chilling despair and Hope of Realisation. The progression is from land-locked Burnt Norton to East Coker, within ear-shot as it were of the sea, and on to the sea-washed Dry Salvages off the coast of New England, and finally to the House dedicated to prayer and meditation—a house that is on earth, and yet a house that is not of the earth. It is thus not difficult to see in the place-names themselves the first clues to the understanding of the historical and spiritual drama unfolded by the sequence of the four poems.

But why are they called *Four Quartets*? In Karnatak music, we talk of *varnas* and *kritis*, and we refer to Tyagaraja's *Pancha Ratnas* (Five Gems) with their unique construction. Beethoven's Last Quartets enjoy a comparable vogue in the Western musical tradition. The celebration of the Beethoven Centenary in 1927 had stimulated fresh interest in his work, and Herbert Howarth plausibly argues that Eliot must have been subtly influenced by J.W.N. Sullivan's *Beethoven—His Spiritual Evolution*:

There are phrases in Sullivan's study which bear a likeness to key phrases of the Quartets ...

Resemblances of detail apart, the Quartets are written with the sense of age approaching, therefore with an urgent will to understand Beethoven who had triumphed over age by exploring the utmost potentialities of his medium.

In 1933, Eliot had speculated on the possibility of writing poetry "which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or poetry so transparent that we should not see the poetry, but that we are meant to see through the poetry .... To get *beyond poetry*, as

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Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get *beyond music*." By a remarkable coincidence, Sri Aurobindo also was thinking of the evolution of the "future poetry" along similar lines. He thought that, like the *mantra* of old, the new poetry sustained by an "overhead aesthesis" should be able to leap over the intervening sensory and intellectual barriers and directly reach the soul: poetry then would be soul communicating with soul, and integrally heightening the awareness of soul, mind, sense and body. The *mantra* of old, uncannily musical and incantatory, as also Sri Aurobindo's "overhead poetry" (pieces like "Rose of God" and, say, the opening canto of *Savitri*) and poetry like *Four Quartets* can be "understood" not otherwise than by subjecting oneself to the total discipline of imaginative attention as poetically described in the following lines:

Its message enters stirring the blind brain  
And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound;  
The hearer understands a form of words  
And, musing on the index thought it holds,  
He strives to read it with the labouring mind,  
But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth:  
Then, falling silent in himself to know  
He meets the deeper listening of his soul:  
The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains:  
Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self  
Are seized unalterably ...

What Sri Aurobindo and Eliot were attempting was to charge the dialect of the tribe with poetic intensity and power, though each hewed his own way to the chosen end. Eliot thought that music, something of the rhythmical and structural discipline of music, something also of its capacity for improvisation and adaptability to the instrument used, could perhaps be imported into poetry with advantage. In his essay on "The Music of Poetry," Eliot says:

There are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem com-

parable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter.

But even as Sri Aurobindo's "Thought the Paraclete" and *Savitri* are much more than an "experiment" in quantitative verse or a Kálidasian rendering of English blank verse, so too Eliot's "Four Quartets," although on their technical side they may have begun as attempts to use in poetry certain ideas of rhythm and structure appropriate primarily to music, are not just a record of experiments but a superb act of poetic creation. The student with a technical knowledge of Western music will no doubt be able to master the filiations between the five movements in each of the Quartets with parallel movements in some of Beethoven's Quartets—the allegro, the scherzo, the minuet, etc. But we should also remember that Eliot was never a mere imitator, and what he borrowed he invariably transformed as well. His plays, for instance, *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk*, *The Elder Statesman*, although they owe something to the *Eumenides*, the *Alcestis*, the *Ion*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*, are hardly "imitations." There are five movements in each of the Four Quartets; but they are neither simple imitations of Beethoven, nor repetitions of one another. There are echoes, the waves come and go; yet, as a whole, *Four Quartets* is vision and revelation in its own right, almost a new kind of poetry.

The first Quartet begins with what looks like an exploration of the possibility of the apprehension of eternity through time, and concludes with the lines:

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight  
Even while the dust moves  
There rises the hidden laughter  
Of children in the foliage  
Quick, now, here, now, always—  
Ridiculous the waste sad time  
Stretching before and after.

The still point of the turning world: *there* (although we do

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not know where), there in Death's "other" kingdom, there time shall cease: but here, *here* in Death's "dream" kingdom, here we may only descend into the dark, and confront *sunya*. Yet the still point, the Incarnation, is alone the centre of light: could we see it, as in a sudden flash (no more), love lights up the understanding for always, and that is Felicity. In the final section of the fourth poem, *Little Gidding*, the wheel comes full circle as it were—"the end is where we started from"—and the concluding words of the poem, while catching up the final accents of *Burnt Norton*, endow them with new light and life:

Quick now, here, now, always—  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flame are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.

Unlike the almost nondescript *Burnt Norton*, the church at Little Gidding is the symbol of the resurrection and life; the past is renewed in the present, and the present invests the past with a new dimension. In the dark night of the contemporary human situation, when death and failure seem to mark the movements of both sense and intellect, there wings before us the Bird of Fire, enacting the splendid experience of Love. The answer to death is Love: Love in union, Love in communion. Love is self-involvement and reunion with the Divine—and so the fire and the rose, the Bird of Fire and Rose of God, the love divine and the love human, could achieve union too.

If *Little Gidding* is *Burnt Norton* in reverse—a necessary movement to complete the full circle—the two middle quartets are rather more personal and *East Coker* even more so than *The Dry Salvages*. Of *East Coker*, F. R. Leavis writes that "it is the most distinctly personal poem of Eliot's we have." The date is 1940 or earlier—or Munich and after! It is characteristic of these four latter-day poems that Eliot now needs no medium like *Prufrock* or *Geronfion* or *Sweeney* to put across

his vague vistas of feeling and his sly hypnotic suggestions. He eschews too the scaffolding of a formal drama or pageant to give visible shape and tremor of life to the seething unseen currents and eddies of his thought. The cunning artificer of poetic techniques has now forged leagues ahead of the angularities of *The Waste Land* period, he has fairly tamed the twin demons of pedantic allusiveness and apparently wilful obscurity, and he has at last broken through and cast away the shell of reserve and learnt to speak to us in simple human accents, trembling in their earnestness, forceful and irresistible in spite of their lack of immediate clarity. Prufrock and Sweeney and Tiresias and the rest of the denizens of "death's dream kingdom" were indeed so many ways of sketching the same thing, each a disturbing half-success for the particular occasion and a mere peevish memory afterwards, like last year's meagre harvest in the context of this year's famine and the bleak prospects for the next year. We thus find Eliot confessing in *East Coker*:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—  
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*  
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure. . .

At any rate, Eliot wouldn't run to seed, he wouldn't cease to hanker after the perfect phrase, the nectarean myth, the archetypal pattern.

In temporal terms, *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding* derive from the post-Munich period comprising Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, and the stalemate in the West. On the other hand, Eliot has managed with the poet's prerogative of puissance and freedom to fuse the fleeting present—the living and the dying present—with the timeless, the forever changeless. Thus the poems, while being localised in space and imprisoned in time, and also endowed with the attributes of sovereignty in space and time: *I am here, Or there, or everywhere; In my beginning is my end; In my end is my beginning.*

*East Coker* is not exactly a war poem, but a poem written in war time. The vain, complacent, proud politicians have bungled, and pushed the world into the vortex of the war:

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Had they deceived us  
Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders,  
Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit?

In the resulting dark of the earth, what one needed was the wisdom of humility, and patience, and silence. The earth is a hospital, a place of purgation; and

The dripping blood is our only drink,  
The bloody flesh our only food.

The Christian ideas of the Annunciation, the Incarnation, the redemptive agony of the Christ, and the orthodox celebration of the Eucharist form part of the pith and marrow of the poetry of the *Quartets*: but these ideas also interpenetrate Herakleitean ideas on the one hand and the ideas of the *Bhagavad Gita* on the other, thus giving to *Four Quartets* dimensions at once religious, philosophical and spiritual. Two of the aphorisms of Herakleitus serve as epigraphs to *Burnt Norton*, and as no epigraphs are prefixed to the other three poems, these Herakleitean aphorisms serve almost as epigraphs to the whole sequence. The first of the aphorisms may be paraphrased as follows in Sri Aurobindo's words:

There is a Word, a Reason in all things, a Logos, and that Reason is one; only men by the relativeness of their mentality turn it each into his personal thought and way of looking at things and live according to this variable activity.

This links up with the Vedic *Ekam Sat, vipra bahuda vadanti*.

The second aphorism, "The way up and the way down are one and the same," may also be paraphrased thus after Sri Aurobindo:

Out of Fire, the radiant and energetic principle, air, water and earth proceed,—that is the procession of energy on its downward road; there is equally in the very tension of this process a force of potential return which would lead things backward to their source in the reverse order. In the balance



of these two upward and downward forces resides the whole cosmic action; everything is a poise of contrary energies.

Herakleitus thought of Fire as the source of all—Fire being Force as well as Intelligence: Fire for Herakleitus was Zeus the Eternal. But beyond Force and Intelligence there is Love. Herakleitus could not give it the place that Christianity gave, yet perhaps, as Sri Aurobindo points out, “his one saying about the Kingdom of the Child touches, almost reaches the heart of the Secret. For this Kingdom is evidently spiritual, it is the crown, the mastery to which the spiritual man arrives; and the perfect man is a divine child!”—

There rises the hidden laughter  
Of children in the foliage  
Quick now, here, now, always . . .

In the Herakleitean system sustained by Force and Intelligence, Love, if it comes in at all, comes in but edgewise: in Christianity, on the other hand, Love really is the heart of the matter. In the integral view of the *Gita*, the rational, the energetic, and the spiritual blaze into the single flame of the Love Divine. It is in *The Dry Salvages* that the Krishna passage occurs, and indeed it is appropriate that this should be so. *Burnt Norton* with its Herakleitean overtones leads to *East Coker* with its Christian undertones, and so we move on to *The Dry Salvages*—there is a sunken world to salvage, there is a distracted humanity to redeem. No man is an island, and no island is an island—“The river is within us, the sea is all about us.” And there is really neither beginning nor end, and poised on the Being we participate in the Becoming. *Karma* cannot be avoided so long as we are caught in the play of Becoming, but *Karma* can be performed without the fetters of calculation, and *Karma* is really the natural irresistible involvement in the motions of *Prakriti*, and *Karma* is above all an act of pure Love offered to the Divine:

Here between the hither and the farther shore  
While time is withdrawn, consider the future

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And the past with an equal mind.  
At the moment which is not of action or inaction  
You can receive this: "on whatever sphere of being  
The mind of a man may be intent  
At the time of death"—that is the one action  
(And the time of death is every moment)  
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:  
And do not think of the fruit of action.  
Fare forward.

The time of death is every moment, and *Kurukshetra* is everywhere; *Karma* (action) links the past and future, and *Karma* cannot be evaded; and what is called for is equality and freedom from fear and desire. In the phenomenal world of Becoming, the movements of *Prakriti* no doubt exemplify the Herakleitean maxim of "One out of all and all out of One," but it is no less true that in the realm of pure Being "All things are One." While being involved in the motions of *Prakriti*, the flux of Becoming, one must needs surrender to the total Love of the One.

*The Dry Salvages* is the image of the shattered world of the crucial years of the war, and Arjuna becomes the prototypical figure of this continuing *Kurukshetra* that provokes Krishna to admonish, advise and give the assurance of *abhaya: ma Sucha!* There are other dialectical symbols too: the ravages of the Dynamo will be exceeded by the love of the Virgin, and the Saint will salvage the Sinner.

More significantly still, Eliot dovetails into the poem these affirmations of the fourteenth-century English mystic, Dame Julian of Norwich, whom May Sinclair has called "the most exquisite and lovable of all mystics":

Sin is Behovely, but  
All shall be well, and  
All manner of thing shall be well...  
By the purification of the motive  
In the ground of our beseeching.

Diverse approaches—the Herakleitean, the Christian, the Hindu

—are made to the central problem posed in the poetic sequence: what do we know, what shall we do, what may we hope for, when age and the fear of death assaults us, and when the world we live in is precipitately careering towards the abyss? There seems to be one answer only, Love:

Who then devised the torment? Love.  
 Love is the unfamiliar Name  
 Behind the hands that wove  
 The intolerable shirt of flame  
 Which human power cannot remove.  
 We only live, only suspire  
 Consumed by either fire or fire.

But that was Dante's answer too, in *The Divine Comedy*—as it is Sri Aurobindo's also, in *Savitri*.

It would of course be a gross misreading of *Four Quartets* to describe it as an up-to-date poetical footnote to Herakleitus, or the *New Testament*, or the *Bhagavad Gita*. Place-names, the pressure of current politics, the desperate edge of the human predicament, the stinging memory of all the dead yesterdays, the dim-lit terror-haunted outlook for Homo Sapiens, the tenuous consolations of conventional religion, the rock-refuges of Faith, all are poetically seized in severe, austere moments of imaginative compenetration, and the four poems create anew both the situation and the action, the terrible inescapable challenge and the currently developing response. Eliot gives us something more than a tentative budget of adjustments and acceptances, something more secure than a cosy arbour of refuge from the oppressive present, something more ambrosial than an easy ersatz faith to seize and cling to—and indeed it is not certain that he had found such an arbour or such an ersatz article for himself. Eliot would rather have us batter our way through to our own arbour, and he would have us hew our own way to the Sanctuary of Faith: “work out your own salvation with diligence.” Miss Kathleen Raine once remarked that Eliot, like St. John the Baptist, “is the last of the prophets of the old order. He is not given to perceive that which will be born—and which, it may well be, he has already bap-

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tised with the genius of his own stern and magnificent poetry." We are often in the intolerable situation of an Ivan Karamazov who would rather "return the ticket than accept a Harmony seemingly built on Pain; and Eliot too, even as he ponders the Apocalypse, seems unwilling to presume a knowledge that he has not actually experienced. Ivan the supersensitive man endowed with a diamond-sharp intelligence must exceed himself and become another Alyosha before he can finally resolve the dichotomy and infer and seize the harmony:

Men's curiosity searches past and future  
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend  
The point of intersection of the timeless  
With time, is an occupation for the saint—  
No occupation either, but something given  
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,  
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

To reduce the obstreperous human will to a cipher, to purge the soul of its egregious infatuation for ghosts and shadows, to tune the entire human instrument into a hymn of sacrificial love, this, this alone is the steep razor-edged path that takes the neophyte to God. In the meantime, the need is for humility, for prayer, for *nishkama karma*:

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire  
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless...  
                and the rest  
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.



THE PILGRIM AND THE PICARO :  
A STUDY OF FAULKNER'S  
*THE BEAR* AND *THE REIVERS*

V. R. N. PRASAD

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*The Bear* and *The Reivers* are two diverse articulations of the same experience of the Southern boy's growth. *The Bear* articulates the manners of the South from the point of view of the Faulknerian morals, while *The Reivers* articulates Southern morals from the new artistic dimension of manners. The young protagonist in both *The Bear* and *The Reivers* is pulled between the two opposing poles of human existence, nature and society, one representing an order of primal force whose laws brook no human exceptions, and the other representing the artifices of civilisation, which bind individuals to a code of conduct, and he is made to confront either of them in its irreducible essence. The hero's initiation into the one reverses his connections with the other, the initiation away from the original centre upon which his consciousness had originally rested. The measure of his response to the two equally potent forces that seek domination over him lies in his capacity for an authentic personalism, which he acquires through his journey in experience. Within this general pattern of the young man's education into the truth of his selfhood, *The Bear* and *The Reivers* between themselves trace out the structure of a fictional point and counterpoint. Ike McCaslin in *The Bear* is a pilgrim in search of the primal simplicities of the wilderness and his chase is not only a progress towards the first facts of truth but also a symbolic regression from the complexities of his southern culture. The object of his

hunt is the bear which symbolises the mystery of nature, in discovering which he explores the mystery of his own selfhood, wrapped up as it is in pattern upon pattern of the tragic heritage of Southern history and his own ancestral familial patronym.

If *The Bear* story dramatizes the ritualistic conversion of the Southern protagonist in the baptismal currents of primitive nature and compels him to disown his Southern personality and thereby achieve a truer conformity to his ideal self-image, the pattern is somewhat inverted in *The Reivers*. The prototypical Southern protagonist is changed from the status of a pilgrim to that of a picaresque protagonist. The picaresque protagonist is one of the familiar fictional archetypes in American literature and Faulkner dramatizes him in the Southern setting. Lucius Priest's world is mechanised amenity as well as duplicity, and his lighting out for freedom and individuality is related in a sequence of serio-comic episodes and events. The demarcation between nature and society is not so clear in Priest's journey as in the case of Ike McCaslin. The ambiguity of his environment is thus open to clarification only by means of a comic irony. Significantly enough, he employs the machine, the stolen automobile, as a means of triumphing over the mechanical in his culture. The automobile is a machine, but it is the means and the symbol of the young man's escaping from the enslaving routines of a mechanised and cultured society into a free, natural openness of the self. In both *The Bear* and *The Reivers*, in spite of their differences in the aesthetic and ideational strategies, the supremacy of natural individuality is asserted; and the return of the simple uncomplicated self is made the pre-condition to the young man's eventual survival in a world of hostile necessity and adverse circumstances.

## I

*The Bear*, like *The Ancient Mariner*, *Moby-Dick* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, is a fable of man's involvement in the domain of nature through the mediation of a zoomorphic symbolization of nature's *mana*. The beast-fable, with its origins in the mythogenic consciousness of primitive man, when it is used in

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sophisticated literature, becomes a symbolic dramatization of the mystery of the universe and man's confrontation with it. Faulkner's story, at its simplest level, is a rendering of this classical motif. But the characteristic ethos of the South is added as a genuine overplus to the primitive mythos of the beast-fable. The final significance of this story rests on the total configuration of the lines of transformation, radiating from the central mystery of the bear, and converging upon the consciousness of Ike McCaslin. The complex background of Ike and the equally complex needs of his personality determine the human action, while the mysterious mythological aura that surrounds the bear clarifies and enhances the relationship between human action and cosmic force. Ike is initiated into the woods and the wilderness code by Sam Fathers, who is a synoptic summation of the young man's complex heritage and paternity.<sup>1</sup> Sam's personality represents a positive if chimerical commixture of the blood streams that have entered into the collective personality of the South. He becomes properly the young man's guide, because in him the Southern blood has been placed out of the reach of conflict and tension, the reason for which harmony lies in the miraculous regenerative contact that he keeps with nature as a veteran hunter in the woods. Sam Fathers has a difficult role to perform in the education of his youthful protege, for his task is no less than one of leading him out of the labyrinth of Ike's complex and convoluted fate as an adolescent facing the unresolved ambiguities and traumatic recognitions forced on him by the cultural differentiations of the South. With a sheltered and almost idyllic boyhood, passed within a reality whose awareness is not altogether determined by the facts of the blood, Ike is suddenly led by the force of his culture to discover his difference, and significantly, from the Negro race. This discovery of his tragic singularity results in a sudden and unprepared isolation and alienation from his boyhood reality. The lonely adolescent must be brought back to the simple origins of nature and be endowed with the redeeming gift of recovering his ele-

<sup>1</sup> Sam Fathers, as Edmond L. Volpe points out, represents the Southern trinity of fathers, the Indian, the Negro and the White patriarchs. See *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), p. 127.



mental human selfhood. The drama of his initiation into the mysteries of the wilderness is essentially an unfolding of Ike's recovery of his primal selfhood.

The society, on whose fringes the wilderness exists as a pre-historic outpost of the racial consciousness, exerts its pressure against the young man in many ways, as is revealed in Ike's retrospective summations of his entire Southern experience involving the land, the society, the family and the ethnic elements of his heritage. Another factor, which inhibits the potentialities of his growth into freedom and spontaneity, is the intensification, by the machine and the machine-oriented world, of the process of cultural abstraction and the consequent human alienation from the primitive sense of identity with the land and nature. The Southern wilderness was a primal hunting ground at first but, with the advance of the so-called Southern culture, plantations supplanted the wilderness, and at a further stage the plantations came to be replaced by townships and cities. The notion that the land was the free bounty of nature mingled with human nurture, directly accessible to man's need and his enterprise was replaced by the abstract conception of proprietary ownership and property rights. The value of nature as a resource for human nurture became corrupted into a vulgar prize for human subsistence by exploitation and by man's inhumanity to man. The sense of ownership became further abstracted and transferred from land to man in which the artifices of culture, colour, blood, class and status played a diabolic role. The white man sought to possess the black man and unwittingly became enslaved by the slave he sought to own. The insidious enslavement of the white man by his fellow white men was inevitable. The merciless logicity of history gave a further proof of the curse of ownership and possessiveness, for the Civil War, the defeat of the South and its domination by the North could only be viewed as a self-engendered catastrophe of the South. Ike's human predicament thus implies nothing less than the whole pattern of the Mephistophelean transformation of the South, and his symbolic recall of his cultural patrimony touches the tragedy of the South at every point.

As he is initiated into the wilderness code, and has his first blessing with the blood-smear on his face from his first kill, Ike's

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regeneration begins. He retraces step by step the essence of his selfhood over the tracks of his personal and cultural history, until he reaches a point where he comes to a recognition of the uniform and universal laws of nature. In his confrontation with the bear, Ike achieves an almost religious transformation, for the great spirit of the invisible power, as manifested in the sylvan deity of the bear, fills his consciousness and completes his rites of passage into adult reality. The religious quality of Ike's growth is unmistakably revealed in his capacity to outgrow the fear of death which was pervasive in the South's awesome, incalculable fear of blood, of the mingling of blood, of the inviolable taboo of the blood. The bear is killed as the primitive god must indeed be killed; and the great chief is killed, too, as though the dismemberment of Orpheus is the ritual concomitant of the myth of the cultural hero's coming of age. Now Ike's isolation seems to be complete, but it acquires the dimension of courageous adult consciousness. Even as he has survived death, by repudiating the fear of it, he is prepared to repudiate the other strategies of death and its other manifestations. This results in Ike's symbolic self-disinheritance of his patrimony, which is the true mark of his growth into, and awareness of, his own individual and human responsibility for his actions, and the world which those actions inevitably bring into being. Faulkner's *The Bear* is thus a forceful dramatization of the young Southern protagonist's initiation into the truth of his own selfhood.

The fable of Ike's progress through the wilderness is interlaced with a number of contrastive episodes and symbolic situations, which differentiate the nature of his transformation from the modes of experience, which continue to persist in an unredeemed world. Boon Hogganbeck represents the unreformed Southern personality, still somehow trying to cling to the Southern values and fetishes of status and ownership, which the inimitable rules and ancient vitalities of nature have disproved. These values and fetishes abstract and duplicate themselves in wistful, nostalgic, and regretful memory. Boon is a man who has not learnt to forget or forgive, and he continues to seek the possession of the unpossessable, although himself dispossessed. In the episode of the "Gum Tree and the Squirrels," this is

illustrated: "Get out of here Don't touch them Don't touch a one of them They're mine."<sup>2</sup>

Boon's illusion is Ike's symbolic stripping himself of all possessions in order to permit the bear to materialise itself in his presence. Ike takes off his watch and discards his compass—the last remnants of his civilized defensive selfhood, and, in doing so, he symbolically surrenders himself unreservedly before the Revelation. The social man becomes refined into the natural man, and the natural man becomes transformed into a religious, confronting and communing with the divine spirit. Ike's ritualistic transfiguration thus sums up, as it were, the entire story of man from his involvement in Original Sin until his eventual redemption by Grace.

*The Bear* is consequently a complete statement of the Faulknerian myth of 'prevalence.' In time and space, in geography and history, in culture and nature, man achieves various degrees of survival and autonomous individuality. But the ultimate 'prevalence' can be conceived of only when he steps out of the various modes of existentialistic selfhood and flows into the consciousness of the universal selfhood. The rightness and intensity of man's ultimate moment of 'prevalence' is the measure of his merger into the domain of truth. Hence, the meaning of Ike's experience can be related only in those words of immortality, by means of which the poet, in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, encloses the finite and the infinite, the transitory and the permanent, as an achieved oneness between man and nature and man and God. Whatever might have been Faulkner's artistic intentions in relating the narrative of a hunting experience, the momentum of the story's intrinsic logic carries forward its meaning towards this inescapable central drama. The same process that transformed *Moby-Dick*, from a fish-book into an almost fictional scripture, has led Faulkner, too, to a contemplative moment of man's isolation uplifting itself into a human self-transcendence. *The Bear*, like other classics of its type, is primarily, and in its totality, a dramatization of man's 'prevalence' in terms of his spiritual transcendence.

<sup>2</sup> *Go Down, Moses* (Penguin, 1960), p. 252.

*The Reivers* is in many ways a comic-absurd reversal and inversion of the miraculous in *The Bear*. The external trappings of the story, its light-hearted responses of fictional artifice, its auctorial self-parodies, and its subversive regressions into Southern sentimentality and romanticism, and above all its un-Faulknerian simplicity and clarity of narrative style, have all combined, it seems, to deflect the critical mind from its symbolic meaning. *The Reivers*, superficially viewed, is yet another story of the young Southern protagonist testing the authenticity of an emergent adolescent selfhood against the realities of the adult world. Lucius Priest<sup>3</sup> is involved in a series of adventurpus misadventures which expose him to the realities of the Southern code of manners and morals, and his consciousness is permitted by gradual degrees to participate in the individuality of Southern culture. Ultimately, he becomes initiated into a world made safe for his selfhood, and the "reiver" is transformed into a legitimate inheritor of his own free soul. Lucius Priest is not a pilgrim like Ike McCaslin; he is a picaro who clowns his way from chaos to order, from anarchy to integration, from ambiguity to unity. Equipped with the archetypal picaro's attributes of impostor, ironist and victim-hero, he rides on the Mephistophelean Engine, until he crosses the open road of experience, then he advances towards his destination of the truth of his own selfhood, and thus emerges from the chaotic underground towards the *terra firma* of genuine self-knowledge and self-affirmation. The action of *The Reivers* is comic only in the same self-denying manner as that of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. *Huckleberry Finn* is not so much a children's book as a book for the adults, for the adult world is seen and formulated through the primary consciousness of a sensitive and impressionable child-hero. The deeper strand of meaning in *The Reivers* is analogously submerged in its fairy-tale like atmosphere. *The Reivers* re-enacts the saga of Southern chivalry and its historical and modern transformations and its transitional agonies and

<sup>3</sup> The name Lucius Priest is an ironic hyphenation of Lucifer and the Christian church, emphasized by Faulkner's iterative contrast between Non-Virtue and Virtue.

divisions and duplicities in much the same manner as Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, or the great classics of the type such as *Satyricon*, or *The Golden Ass*. Disturbing as it might appear to be in the conventional Faulknerian canon, *The Reivers* nevertheless belongs to a literary genre with a legitimate European and American background.

The main strand of action revolves round the "borrowing" (an almost scriptural euphemism for stealing) of an automobile by Boon Hogganbeck and the young Lucius Priest. This unauthorised borrowing sets off a chain reaction, which flares up into a series of inter-related, but bafflingly intricate episodes which can only be deciphered in the end with the aid of a denouement in retrospect. The narrative technique with its carefully planned delayed revelations proves very effective in sustaining the reader's interest till the very end, and to accommodate the shift from the tragic to the comic vision, the usual polyphonic rhetoric is substituted by a rich and racy dialogue. The story opens with one of those habitual misdemeanours of Boon Hogganbeck, the provincial moron, his frantic search for a revolver to kill Ludus, the Negro wagon driver, for supplying him with adulterated and sub-standard whiskey. His clumsy marksmanship, however, causes no more damage than a shattered window-pane and superficial lacerations to a Negro girl. The inquest not only reveals the usual underhand dealings of hired hands in any large establishment, but also gives Faulkner an opportunity to acquaint us with the general situation and formally introduce several new characters.

Boon Hogganbeck, who is familiar to us as the man instrumental in annihilating the wilderness spirit embodied by the zoomorphic "Big Ben," the bear (in *The Bear*), now assumes the role of the initiator of the "machine age" into Jefferson. In collaboration with Mr. Buffaloo, the provincial mechanical wizard, he learns enough about automobiles to become "the dean of Jefferson motor-car drivers." Lucius Priest's grandfather, the banker, is forced to buy an automobile (a Winton Flyer), not because he wanted to defy Col. Sartoris' ordinance banning automobiles from the streets of Jefferson, but because "Colonel Sartoris' crime was simply in having taken the part of his senior in a move which they both approved. . . ." Thus, the pride and

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the petty rivalry of the bankers provide Boon both his "soul's mate," and an opportunity to destroy grandfather Priest's ingrained traditional conservatism. The automobile serves as a convenient surrogate for his destructive potentialities. By playing upon the banker's mercenary apprehension, he becomes not only the chauffeur but the sole manager of the automobile. The sensation caused by the introduction of "the insolent chariot," the motor car, the thrill experienced by an automobile ride when it was still an adventurous rarity, the problem they faced, the innovations they made, the quaint sartorial equipment they used in those early days, are all elaborately and graphically described.

But soon the demise of a near relative removes the family to Bay St. Louis. Their absence provides the real opportunity for these "reivers" to pool or confederate their inherent delinquent tendencies. The mere fact "that the owner of that automobile, and everyone else having or even assuming authority over it, would be three hundred miles from it for anywhere from four days to a week"<sup>4</sup>, spontaneously engenders their criminal motive: "Boon's fall and mine were not only instantaneous but simultaneous too: back at the identical instant when Mother got the message that Grandfather Lessep was dead."<sup>5</sup> Most of the third chapter is taken up with young Lucius Priest's dilemma and his ultimate choice. At eleven years he appears to be far more advanced than many men in most matters. The skilful rationalization of his deliberate choice to flout the restrictions or the taboos imposed, the shrewd moralization and the championing of the cause of Non-virtue are all conducted with irrefutable sophistry:

. . . what pity that Virtue does not—possibly cannot—take care of its own as Non-virtue does. Probably it cannot: who to the dedicated to Virtue, offer in reward only cold and odourless and tasteless virtue: as compared not only to the bright rewards of sin and pleasure but to the ever-watchful unflagging omniprescent skill—that incredible matchless capacity for invention and imagination with which even the

<sup>4</sup> *The Reivers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), pp. 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

tottering footsteps of infancy are steadily and firmly guided into the primrose path.<sup>6</sup>

Thus we find Lucius Priest being transformed into Lucifer's prime votary. Dr. Faustus had at least bartered his soul after long deliberation, and expert counsel from both the good and the bad Angels. Lucius Priest however sells his soul not for any "consideration" but offers it as a gratuitous gift to Non-virtue:

I was in the position of the old Negro who said, "Here I is, Lord. If you wants me saved, you got the best chance you ever seen standing right here looking at you". I had shot my bow, Boon's too. If Non-virtue still wanted either of us, it was now her move.<sup>7</sup>

The only consolation he derives from this act is not any fulfilment of *la amour de impossible*, but a perilous automobile ride which plunges him and his collaborators into devious, nightmarish adventures. The urchin's psychic conflict and his moral disintegration are immensely exaggerated by Faulkner. The specious, pseudo-philosophical and inverted moralistic attitude of the juvenile protagonist provides an "objective correlative" and a symbolic depth to the otherwise facile picaresque narrative.

The Reivers' passage to Memphis and their efforts to cross the "Hell Creek" mud-hole offer Faulkner a chance to discharge a few broadsides at the futility of all mechanical contrivances, especially the automobile:

. . . the expensive useless mechanical toy rated in power and strength by the dozens of horses, yet held helpless and impotent in the almost infantile clutch of a few inches of the temporary confederation of two mild and pacific elements—earth and water—which the frailest integers and units of motion as produced by the ancient unmechanical methods, had coped with for countless generations without really having noticed it; the three of us, three forked identical and now

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

unrecognisable mud-coloured creatures engaged in a life-and-death struggle with it, the progress—if any—of which had to be computed in dreadful and glacier-like inches.<sup>8</sup>

At Memphis, Boon takes Lucius Priest to Miss Reba's bustling boarding house at Catalpa Street. There, certain revelations made by Otis, "l'enfant terrible," the nephew of one Miss Corrie (alias Everbe Corinthis, a prostitute), and later the abominable behaviour of Butch, the impostor, increase his awareness of the seminal depravity of all adults, and he comes to hate life itself. It is ironic that a cousin of Ike McCaslin should have Boon as his mentor and acquire refinement in a Memphis whore-house and in the environment of the Parsham race-track.

The swapping of the automobile for a horse by Ned McCaslin, the Negro attendant, further complicates the already complex situation. He silences Boon and Lucius Priest by reminding them of their predicament, and proposes a novel plan to extricate all of them from the dire peril. His plan takes them all, including the inmates of Miss Reba's establishment, to Parsham to participate in a horse-race against Col. Linscomb's horse. Then a series of inexplicable incidents takes place. Several of them are incarcerated, released, and again incarcerated. The bewitching presence of Everbe and her refusal to accede to the demands of her suitors, because of her reformation induced by Priest's upright gentlemanly code, pose serious problems. The ultimate success of Forkid Lighting—the sardine-eating horse with the "mule sense"—ridden by Lucius Priest resolves all this labyrinthine involvement from escalating into tragic consequences. The upshot, as we are given to understand, is that Ned swaps the automobile for this horse, Forkid Lighting, with a pronounced penchant for sardines, merely to extricate another Negro relative of his from serious financial problems accumulated by way of gambling debts. The presence of Priest's grandfather at the race-track, which soon turns into active participation in the horse-race, rescues all the desperadoes from the much-feared aftermath. Priest is forgiven after a mild rebuke, Ned is satisfied with his profits made during the horse-race, Boon is happily

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.



married to Miss Corrie, the penitent prostitute, and finally *The Reivers*, like Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, ends in a mood of pre-comic tragedy, culminating in sheer horse-play, both literally and metaphorically.

*The Reivers* projects the same complex Southern world as occurs in Faulkner's other novels, although its relation to human character is only tangential, for it is framed in the formal mode of comic action and picaresque escape. The hero's environment is complex enough, with its characteristic ingredients of racial ambivalence, and the evils of masculine greed and feminine sensuality. The relativisms of crime and punishment and law and justice have their own atmospheric presence in the structure of reality that controls the young boy's developing maturity. The world of experience has no power, however, of tainting the "radical innocence" of Lucius Priest and the latter even exercises an indirect metamorphic power and influence over his environment. This power of the innocent hero is derived from his capacity for irony which corresponds to his capacity to prevail in a world of irony as well. The heroic ironist has the awareness of detachment, as well as a flair for the detachment of his awareness, from the complicating strands of his own personal experience, and the public roles he is asked to perform in his society. This innate solidity of unimpaired and untainted consciousness of the hero achieves a miracle of transformation from the season of boyhood to the age of adult reality. Lucius Priest emerges from the Southern inferno without the catastrophe of damnation towards the purgatorial slopes of harmonious adulthood. The act of reiving, viewed in this light, is but a restoration of natural instincts, a symbolic dispossession of the polar motivation of man seeking to rob nature of her possessions, which he can never possess, and consequently enacts human tragedies.

One of the interesting symbolizations of this world of miraculous transformations is to be found in the curious confederation of the machine and the animal in the restoration and re-ordering of the disturbed harmony of the Southern order brought about by the petty larceny. As the pointillistic emergence of the picaro's image is brought to its artistic climax, Lucius converts the mechanical contraption into a near mythical contrivance helping him to achieve and preserve and sustain his freedom.

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The machine is an ironic *deus ex machine* in *The Reivers*, for it not only generates the apparent evil and its concomitant guilt in the story's action, but it is also the dynamic of *felix culpa* which establishes the final organic contact between innocence and experience, in whose synthesis the terrors of punishment are alleviated by the mysteries of justice. It seems as though the hero of this conventional, sentimental Southern fairy-tale, above all other Faulknerian protagonists, achieves a perfectly satisfactory accommodation between his selfhood and the reality of the universe. Lucius Priest is not an isolate, and his sense of connection with his world averts what in the case of other Faulknerian young protagonists become a tragedy. Nor is he an idiot mind completely separated from his own sense of individual being, which too might have mirrored the other side of the Southern tragedy in his personality. As the fictional "Eironos," he touches, and is touched by, life at all points of his adolescent consciousness. This double participation in a richly varied personal and impersonal realm of experience constitutes his mode of prevailing. He not only survives, but also prevails. In the golden mean of comedy, it appears, Faulkner has at last achieved the great equation he had been searching for in all his work. Swiggert, therefore, is not far from convincing when he speculates on the possibility of Faulkner having taken a new look at the tormented and tragedy-ridden history of his Yoknapatawpha country, had he lived beyond this significant turning-point in his career. The result might have been a refreshing Faulknerian Divine Comedy on the American South.



## MACLEISH'S *J. B.* : A TRAGEDY OF AFFIRMATION

N. S. SUBRAMANYAM

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### I

THE MOVEMENT for a revival, or rather a renaissance of poetic drama in the twentieth century, has been there on both sides of the Atlantic since the eighteen-nineties when W. B. Yeats and his collaborators thought of making "the theatre a place of intellectual excitement, a place where the mind goes to be liberated as it was liberated by the theatres of Greece, England and France at certain great moments of their history."<sup>1</sup> Poets of the theatre, whether Yeats or T. S. Eliot, Christopher Fry or Archibald MacLeish, have attempted to fuse into the framework of the play an *archetypal* moral pattern, which may leave a deep impression on the contemporary audiences. Yeats spoke of "a return to the way of our fathers, of the moral law for the sake of the moral law, a casting out of all anecdotes and of that brooding over scientific opinion."<sup>2</sup> Eliot in the 'thirties and 'forties undertook a double search for the development of a satisfactory form for poetic drama and for a regenerative faith—a satisfying if not very ennobling *katharsis* for the audience after the play was enacted. But poets of the theatre have been accused of running away from "the spectacle of human life," in their pre-occupation with a basic pattern of experience in life. John Gass-

<sup>1</sup> *Plays and Controversies* (London, 1927), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Cutting of an Agate* (London, 1919), p. 77.

ner, for example, has accused Eliot of having "lost humanity. . . in the process of seeking to redeem mankind." Cassner goes on to say: "Thus far in his work for the stage, Eliot whose highest ambition for mankind transcends the world and the flesh, has brought too narrow a heart to the spectacle of human life."<sup>3</sup>

If the four knights are indifferent to Becket's martyrdom, or Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly shrugs away Celia Coplestone's cruel crucifixion, it is because suffering is part of the *design*. Eliot was possibly too much influenced by the myth of the "hanged god" and so presented his thesis of self-immolation in poems and plays—"the awful daring of a moment's surrender/which an age of prudence can never retract."<sup>4</sup>

In Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.* (produced by Elia Kazan at the ANTA Theatre, New York City, on December 11, 1958, though published as early as 1956), one comes across an approach opposite to that of Eliot. Eliot was convinced that one could get out of the "time-event-complex" only by the knowledge of "stillness" (*Shantih*—"The Peace that passeth understanding"):

The endless cycle of idea and action  
Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not a stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the word.<sup>5</sup>

If Eliot was convinced that "in order to arrive at knowing everything, desire to know nothing," MacLeish was for acceptance, as he explained, *an affirmation of faith in life* again, even if it involved a cycle of suffering, "an affirmation of the fundamental human thing—the fundamental human love of life as life and in spite of all the miseries of life. . . ." <sup>6</sup> Eliot saw in Becket's death only the fulfilment of a pattern "out of life", "out of time":

for the pattern is the action  
And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still be  
forever still<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *The Theatre in Our Time* (New York, 1954), p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> *Collected Poems* (London, 1936), "The Waste Land," lines 404-405.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> *Theatre Arts*. XLIII (April, 1963), 61-2.

<sup>7</sup> *Murder in the Cathedral* (London, 1936), p. 21.

MacLeish's J. B.

But in MacLeish's *J.B.*, the Hebrew folk-tale of Job the archetypal Man, "Oh, there's always someone playing Job"<sup>8</sup>—is a vehicle for affirming faith in human life, despite disasters and sufferings for which no cause can be found. It is futile also to look up to the Unknown—call it God—for enlightenment or amelioration. Job stands up to sufferings and finds at the end that that which will sustain life forever is *love*:

We are and that is all our answer  
We are and what we are can suffer.  
But—  
What suffers loves.  
Risk its own defeat again  
Endure the loss of everything again  
And yet again and yet again.<sup>9</sup>

In the Book of Job, the folk-tale of the man in the land of Uz, who loses everything in earthly life, who goes on questioning God—Job is speaking in the bitterness of his soul:

I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; show me  
wherefore thou contendest with me.  
Is *it* good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that  
thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and  
shine upon the counsel of the wicked? <sup>10</sup>

But Jehovah only denies him the right of questioning. MacLeish uses the same device of "The Distant Voice"—Voice out of the Whirlwind, challenging the right of J.B. (Job—the archetypal man) to demand a reason for his suffering. In fact he cleverly interpolates the Biblical text in the middle of his version of the myth:

Who is this that darkneth counsel  
By words without knowledge?

<sup>8</sup> *J.B.* (London, 1959), p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> *Job*, 10, 2, 3.

God demands acceptance and resignation on the part of man, his will crushed—all passions spent, the ego annihilated. J.B. (Man) has to accept life, though the choric character, Mr. Nickles (the circus pop-corn seller), feels revolted:

Live his life again?  
Not even the most ignorant, obstinate,  
Stupid or degraded man  
This filthy planet ever farrowed  
Offered the opportunity to live  
His bodily life twice over, would accept it,  
Least of all Job; poor trampled bastard!  
It can't be borne twice over! Can't be!<sup>11</sup>

Job does accept his wife back—symbolically accepting life—without seeking reasons to justify his suffering.

II

Just as other poets of the theatre have recreated great myths of the past as vehicles to convey their meanings to the contemporary world, myths like the story of the Atridae or of the Theban cycle, MacLeish has re-created the ancient Hebrew folk-tale into a powerful tragedy of affirmation. Eliot's Becket actively works for martyrdom despite his disclaimer to the Fourth Tempter. So also his Celia Coplestone and her psychiatrist, Sir Henry, actively cooperate in a deliberate self-abnegation compact. Celia tells the consultant:

I want to be cured  
Of a craving for something I cannot find  
And of the shame of never finding it.<sup>12</sup>

Sir Henry, acting as the all-knowing Magus, tells her to undertake the suicidal step of practising the Christian ideals of service in a distant tribal land (Kinkanja) and undergo crucifixion:

<sup>11</sup> J.B., p. 117.

<sup>12</sup> *The Cocktail Party* (London, 1949), p. 123.

MacLeish's J. B.

You will journey blind but the way leads towards  
possession  
Of what you have sought for in the wrong place.<sup>13</sup>

In MacLeish's *J.B.*, Job is faced with temptation in the weighty personages of Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite—the three comforters with their bleak philosophy of man's utter helplessness and insignificance, proffering their championship of scientific materialism in neat generalizations:

ZOPHAR : God will not Himself reply  
From the blue depths of His eternity.  
ELIPHAZ : Blind depths of His Unconsciousness.  
BILDAD : Blank depths of His Necessity.  
ZOPHAR : God is far above in Mystery.  
ELIPHAZ : God is far within in Mindlessness.  
BILDAD : God is far beyond in History.<sup>14</sup>

Bildad, a confirmed dialectical materialist, proclaims that the individual's suffering, consciousness of guilt is "a sociological accident," "a psycho-phenomenal situation,"

That filthy feeling at the fingers,  
Scent of dung beneath the nails.<sup>15</sup>

The role of Canterbury Women in Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* is taken over by Zuss and Nickles with the difference that they assume the God and the Satan masks as they carry on the eternal debate between what is benevolent (Divinity) and what is Evil (Satan)—the latter is permitted by the Almighty to subject the devotee of the Lord to a series of trials in a bid to destroy his faith in Him. This is the way of all myths to clear the responsibility of the Lord for human suffering—putting down suffering as the handiwork of Satan, that too at the sufferance of the Lord Himself. This sort of built-in explanation is avail-

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>14</sup> *J.B.*, p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.



able in all our ancient myths and lives of saints. But MacLeish has turned this idea of God Himself permitting His servant Job to be subjected to an ordeal, into just theological "masks" or illusions, assumed by Zuss and Nickles. In other words, MacLeish has successfully kept the Job story from becoming an "absurd" pre-ordained theme of suffering, but of significance to the contemporary world which calls for a definite commitment to life. The contemporary Job cannot hope to have a "compensatory heaven" simply because he suffers at the behest of God, and proves to God his devotion to Him. The purpose of life is achieved by actually living through all these. The emphasis is on the need to know by being and not by *conceiving* in theological or theoretical terms.

## III

In form, *J.B.* is comparable to Eliot's *Murder* or Auden's *The Ascent of F6*, based on the Morality tradition. It has the Morality element in the sense it can be taken as a "dramatized allegory" (a phrase of Hardin Craig's), with *J.B.* acting the role of Eternal Man subject to suffering and temptation to repudiate faith in God. The presence of Zuss and Nickles perched high on top of the stage—the circus ring symbolising the world itself, a circus in which the symbolic Man (*Humanum Genus* of the Morality tradition) undergoes his trial—brings in society or the community itself at large as the witness. It is significant to note here that they enter the stage from the auditorium, in full view of all, and not through the wings (which are absent).

The two acts of the play are well integrated into the pattern, almost better than the two parts of Eliot's *Murder*, which are separated by a Christmas Day sermonising over the nature of martyrdom. Becket is made to speak as if his martyrdom is a foregone conclusion. This appears too deliberate even if one were to keep in mind the fact that Eliot's play is a Canterbury Cathedral play, re-enacting, as a "Passion Play" does, the legendary event:

It is not in time that my death shall be known;  
It is out of time that my decision is taken

MacLeish's J. B.

If you call that decision  
To which my whole being gives entire consent.<sup>16</sup>

The well-known early Morality, *Everyman*, could be brought in to provide a parallel in certain respects, with its utter simplicity of conception, with Everyman (*Humanum Genus*) facing the supreme test of Death, having lost all the props on which an individual stands for support, "Fellowship, Beaute, Strength" and so on. In *J.B.*, as in this 16th century Morality, "there is a contest for the soul of a representative of all mankind,"<sup>17</sup> in the sense that there is the attempt of the Comforters to make him run away from his commitment to God. God and Death are the two overviews in the medieval play, as the two circus clowns with the masks of God and Satan become the choric commentators in the modern play. Everyman (like his counterpart J.B.) has to be deceived and deserted by all those qualities and values from which he hopes to derive comfort. Of course, the removal of the various props which support Everyman is not as shocking as the successive blows delivered against Job or J.B. Everyman finds at least his cup is not drained totally. There is "Good Dedes" who speaks on his behalf, and mitigates his despair to a great extent:

All earthly thinges is but vanyte  
Beaute, Strength and Dyscrecyon do man forsake  
Folysse frendes and kynnes men that fayre spake,  
All fleeth save Good Dedes, and that am I.<sup>18</sup>

For J.B. there is nothing external to hold on to, except his faith in himself and love that man still bears towards his fellow beings. The two circus vendors Zuss and Nickles may be considered to fill the role of the ordinary run of humanity, just as the medieval craftsman stood by when a Morality was produced, taking part as the Greek Chorus did, in the performance of the play.

<sup>16</sup> *Murder in the Cathedral*, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> *English Religious Drama*, ed. Hardin Craig (London, 1955), p. 348.

<sup>18</sup> *English Miracle Plays Moralities and Interludes*, ed. A. F. Pollard.

In *The Ascent of F 6* by Auden and Isherwood, the theme is again another aspect of an individual's personal desire for an escape from an obsession—brother hatred—which feeds his ego. In all moralities, the main theme is the overcoming of temptations or illusions. Before Becket are the Four Tempters the last of whom is the most subtle. He advocates the desire to achieve glory as a saint:

Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest  
On earth, to be high in heaven.<sup>19</sup>

Before J.B. also, it is a matter of living down even his love of God and the claim of special treatment from Him, his own peculiar subterfuge and sublimation:

Cry for justice and the stars  
Will stare until your eyes sting!  
Weep  
Enormous winds will thrash the water!<sup>20</sup>

The tragedy is that even love of God is a sin in the eyes of God, if there be such a person, especially if that love affords an excuse for the ego. Love of God, or the desire to become a martyr in the service of the Lord, is really as Eliot's Becket reflects, "the last temptation . . . the greatest treason". Ransom in Auden's *Morality* learns from the Abbot of a Himalayan monastery that he has also a greater temptation to face—"the Temptation of pity; the temptation to overcome the Demon by Will . . .".<sup>21</sup> "the destructive element of the will."<sup>22</sup> J.B. does come to a choice at the end, the affirmation of faith in his own ability as a human being to begin life all over again, despite torments and disasters. If in the Book of Job, Job's suffering is rather beyond his realm of knowledge, in MacLeish's *J.B.*, suffering leads to a new faith, faith in Man, and not so much in Jehovah!

MacLeish's *J.B.* could be classified, as Denis Donoghue does,

<sup>19</sup> *Murder in the Cathedral*, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> *J.B.*, p. 125.

<sup>21</sup> *The Ascent of F 6* (London, 1936), p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

MacLeish's *J. B.*

a "*drame a these*", a play with an ethical motive. He had experimented with a "Mood Play" earlier in the decade, *This Music Crept by Me on the Water* (1953), concerned with building up of a mood and not so much the representation of contending forces. It is only in *J.B.* that he could visualize the power of these contending forces—intense faith in his proximity to God and the other extreme of repudiation of any benevolence, leading towards a third possibility, namely faith in his own ability to go through all and endure. *J.B.* is a play in which Man's ability to endure all that chance may thrust upon him, with no prop to hold him up, is the thesis. *J.B.*, therefore, is no tragedy in which the hero is a symbolic sacrifice for effecting *katharsis* in others, but a play in which the commitment is to life is affirmed.



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IV  
THE UNFOLDING CYCLE

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## ART AND ARTIFICE IN AMERICAN POETRY

V. Y. KANTAK

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THERE HAVE always been attempts to define the "Americanness" of American literature, and there always will be. In fact this has been an obsessive theme with the American critics themselves. For them, it has to be part of that larger assertion of American self-hood in the terms of the highest kind of expression, that of literature. And it is a continuing concern. The point was recently made, for example, by Francis Murphy in his "Going it Alone—Estrangement in American Poetry" (*Yale Review*, Autumn, 1966). The American writer being orphaned, so to say, from literary tradition, is always rather desperately trying to be self-reliant—both in form and content. This has its advantages, but at the same time, there is a price to pay:

Ours is a literature of exile. It is full of isolates and eccentrics who express themselves in watchful declamation or defensive mimicry or in the ingenious spinning out of hallucinatory tales as if to call into existence by tricks of spell-binding that audience which they know is not there except they manage to create it... It cultivates the private nervous sensibility preferring the rough and unpolished to polished forms. . . . The American writer is at best a Maverick; he says 'no in thunder' to more than conventional forms and his characteristic tone is blasphemy, the voice of the upstart. . .

As this writer sees it, the true and only tradition in American



letters has been to say "no" to tradition and to take one's chances. One therefore engages oneself in a futile search for new forms, confusing ingenuity with art. This continual drawing on of one's personal resources is exhausting, debilitating. The result has been, as Auden noted, "too cranky, too earnest, too scornful of elegance" though, of course, at the same time, bold and vigorous and original—may be, not always in the best sense of that term. I must say in parenthesis that one is struck by the American writer's capacity for self-denigration. It is one of his most ingratiating qualities—this humility before world opinion!

There is, however, nothing very new in all this. From the start, observers have noted in American literature a slant for the arcane and for the symbolic. D. H. Lawrence called it "the inevitable falseness, duplicity of art, American art in particular." "Americans," he said, "refuse everything explicit and always put up a sort of double meaning. They revel in subterfuge. They prefer their truth safely swaddled in an ark of bulrushes, and deposited among the reeds until some friendly Egyptian princess comes to rescue the babe" (*Studies in Classic American Literature*). And we must add that the babe, however, is no less than Moses.

Take, for instance, the evidence provided by the recent vogue of "American New Criticism." It is true that a new poetry must create the taste by which it is to be relished; and in the effort to define and elaborate the basis of that taste new norms are set up by criticism, new norms of poetic excellence. It is equally true that these norms in their turn influence the practice of contemporary poets. That there has been such a reciprocal relation and an active kinship between poetry and critical activity in recent years is fairly obvious to any observer of the American scene. And what did the New Critics achieve? What did they emphasize? Or rather what did they omit to emphasize? There is no doubt that the brilliant poet-critics of this age—Ransom, Tate, Blackmur, Brooks, Penn Warren—have done great service by demonstrating what is involved in judging poetry as poetry and not as something else; they have taught us to pay attention to what a work of art really means and how it should be approached—that art can explore the meaning of experience only

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by heightening our awareness of the way language functions in literature. In other words, to use I.A. Richards' sublime understatement, they taught a whole generation "how to read a page."

But could it be fairly denied, after we have taken stock of all they have said, that the effect of their work has been to give substance to the motto: "In craft all values lie"? Indeed, some would go to the extent of saying that they have set up "analysability" as a sort of criterion of poetic excellence, that they have made poets unduly conscious of their craft. So that the indignant reader begins to protest: "Poets must not be too keen to argue about the laws of their art, for when they lose their innocence their charm goes with it," and that "Nothing is more barren than art which is interested in itself rather than its subject." After all, a profound understanding of how language works in a poem is not possible without a profound understanding of men. The New Critics seem to have shied away from this implication. They have brought about a change in our attitude to poetry and to poets. What is sacrificed in the process is perhaps the living sense of the poet's mind which holds all tensions and in which all paradoxes are reconciled. Or, as Spender put it, "We separate the idea of the poem from the image of the poet."

Now it may be possible to set this aside as no more than an episode in the history of American letters. Could it be the manifestation of a deeper impulse that has always characterized American poetry? I am, of course, generalizing. And it is no use burking the issue—"to generalize is the quality of an idiot," Blake said. If one *must* generalize, one might as well start with Adam and Eve, as Blake himself did in a manner of speaking. Is there something in the American psyche that makes the American poet prone to the lure of craft? Shall we say that, in America, *Homo Faber* gains ascendancy over *Homo Sapiens*? This is a sociological problem. And here the American critic is ready to help. And not only the literary critic; all those who have written on the American character and expatiated on the American's too loving nature, regarding him as some sort of an arch-fabricator, would eagerly put in a word. It is as though the propensity to "gadgetry," so facetiously attributed to the American, were to be reflected in the poet's

handling of his tools.

Needless to say, a great deal of this is at the egregious level of popular fallacies about different nationalities—the British are a nation of shop-keepers, Germans are work-fiends (while others work in order to live, the Germans live in order to work), and so on. By that logic, Indians are afflicted with work-phobia and are a nation of lotos-eaters—God knows, there may be more show of reason in that!

Whatever truth there might be in these facile generalizations, one thing will be conceded. Distance may be an advantage to the observer of a literary scene. What is not perceptible to the British and to the American may loom large in the vision of an Indian, because of the vantage of perspective. Those of us who have felt the impact of both the literatures ponder the question: does this separation of "the idea of the poem" from "the image of the poet" strike us as a more pronounced tendency in American poetry than in British Poetry? When we think of the classics of English poetry we are aware that the advent of a great poet—Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth—has meant a technical renewal; each one has spoken in a new voice, fashioned for poetry a new language. For the work of the poets is a continual effort to renew the language of the tribe. "Every great and original writer," said Wordsworth, "must create the taste by which he is to be relished." But each time, the new form has emerged from the necessity and the pressure of the new thing to be said. Each time, we make the connection naturally between the image of the poet's mind and the technical revolution he has brought about. Between the new sensibility, the new urges, that hinterland of inner tumult and change and the "language" of the poem there is a congruity so unshakeable that it doesn't occur to us to call in question the possibility of a distinction. So is it with the poetry of the Renaissance, Spenser, and with Shakespeare, with the Puritan Milton, with the Romantic Wordsworth. So it must also be, of course, with the great renovators of poetic language in American literature. But as an American critic has put it: "For many American poets this necessity—that of changing the mode of poetic speech—has seemed inescapable for every serious writer whether great or small." (Whicher, "The Art of Poetry," *A Time of Harvest*.) In

fact, they rather seem to take it from the opposite end—the craft end, as though an attempt at a new mode of speech engenders the poetic renewal.

In American literature itself there seems to be a split between the two conception of poetry. Critics have concerned themselves with the kind of schism that exists between the art of a Whitman and that of a Henry James. Philip Rahv some time back christened the two types of authors with the picturesque epithets of “palefaces” and redskins,” taking Henry James and Walt Whitman as the representative figures. Philip Rahv was concerned with the distinction between the sophisticated European concept of literature and that which has sprung from the native soil—in other words with the question of the “Expatriate” in American letters. Actually, the sophistication of the “palefaces” too often appears in the form of an extreme virtuosity which marks their highly self-conscious art.

Of Henry James himself there must be continuing debate in this respect. Without taking sides with Van Wyck Brooks and accepting his stunning strictures on the American *Emigres* (“A writer should not leave his country for too long a time. He should live one life with her. Otherwise, he is lost.” Dostoevsky), is it not possible to sense the sources of his dissatisfaction? There is perhaps a moral to be derived from the fact that after the brilliance of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Bostonians*, James’s later novels—*The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*—seem to suffer from “a hypertrophe of technique.” They are smothered, as it were, in a kind of waste fertility of the indirections and subtleties of James’s decline. So that James’s appearance of depth seemed to Van Wyck Brooks, and not only to him, wholly an illusion. There is much meat in his comment that, when questions of technique fill the minds of critics, James has always much of technical interest for them, that is, at a time when the religion of art becomes virtually the only religion.

But the true exemplars of this opposition of the two types in American poetry are, of course, Whitman and Poe. It is not necessary to elaborate the atrocious crudities of that “redskin” Whitman, the White Aboriginal; they lie very much on the surface such as they are. Any baby critic can pick them up. He

sets a hard test to the reader of even indifferently refined sensibilities—he dares you to swallow him whole (beard and all), or else to break faith with poetry. Critics may bewail the fact that he has done as much to ruin poetry and prose—he has abolished that distinction!—as any single influence in America. They may bewail his formlessness, his phallicism, his noisy optimism, his journalistic mediocrity, his flaunting and his posing and feel, as did Santayana, that “There is no inside to Whitman’s perceptions.” And if you talk of his egotism, he would, of course, retort: “I dote on myself, there is that lot of me and all so luscious.” “The interesting thing about his language is how unusually absurd, how really ingeniously bad, such language is.” (Randall Jarrell.) He is, in short, the rashest, the most inexplicable and unlikely, the most impossible of poets. And yet, when all is said, he is the greatest embodiment of the American experience. And the elements of the poetic mould in which that experience is cast—the *vers libre*, the absurd rhetoric, all the blooming chaos of the verse, are one piece with it. Whitman’s art and aestheticism is bound up in his “personalism,” and issues directly from, and merges with, the image of the poet. The poet’s intuition is the art and the structural principle. “No man will get at my verses,” Whitman declared, “who insists upon viewing them as a literary performance, or as aiming toward art or aestheticism.”

If, in Whitman’s case, there is no separating of the idea of the poem from the image of the poet, in Poe such a separation seems to be art’s very foundation. He too sets a hard test for the reader, and for the opposite reasons. Poetry now aims at beauty and is to be composed in obedience to rigorous technical standards. What is more, the guiding principle behind such a carefully calculated construction is our preconception of the effect it would have upon the reader. Artifice, thus consciously applied, results in art. The more strictly this is done, the greater is the art. A poem is primarily “the construction of an effect,” Poe declared. And we watch with bated breath the growth of his poem “The Raven” as he undertakes to describe it in “The Philosophy of Composition”—how each stylistic element leads on to the other by a regimen of abstract necessity. “It is my design to render it manifest,” says Poe, “that no one point in its

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composition is referable either to accident or intuition—that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.”

It is a fantastic vision of Hephaestus, the divine fabricator, at his smithy. And the art is a kind of mechanics which must somehow eventuate an ineffable illumination. The engineering must produce the lily of the valley, or perhaps, the sky-blossom *Akasa-Kusuma*, to use a Sanskrit idiom. It is significant that Poe ends his analysis with the remark that the reader “now” begins to regard “The Raven” as emblematical. And this effect seems to have made him the apostle and law-giver of the French Symbolists, Baudelaire and Mallarmé identifying his work as “poesie pure.” For the readers of Poe’s English work, however, that identification may seem based on a misunderstanding—a confusion of the Edgar Allan Poe, the American writer, with the “Edgarpo” of the French imagination as he wished to present himself to the world.

In any case, it is clear that his impact on poetic practice is to remove the idea of the poem the farthest distance from the image of the poet. And it is interesting to note that he blames Wordsworth for wearing away his youth in contemplation. All the points he made in his influential statement tie up with this conclusion, one way or other—his rejection of what he called the heresy of *the didactic*, his refusal to reconcile the obstinate oils of poetry and Truth, his opposition to the long poem (more than half of *Paradise Lost*, he said, is prose), his notion that poetry achieves supernal beauty in its pure form, that is, when it approaches the condition of music—and so on. A poet like Tennyson becomes the supreme exemplification of his theory. And it is something of an anti-climax that at the end of “The Poetic Principle” he should offer us Longfellow’s “Waif,” Byron’s “June,” Tennyson’s “Tears, Idle Tears,” and Motherwell’s “Songs of a Cavalier” as models of that supernal beauty. In his own practice, not infrequently, the theory produces little more than the doggerel of the American “Jingle man” as he was called in hostile quarters. There is also this to be considered: If the poem is wrought with such infinite care on the sole regulating principle of the effect of the words on the reader, the reader might offer it an answering response. He is not called upon to

witness what is happening in somebody's mind or attend to the way art explores experience; but having bought the poet's book and paid his money for the treat, he sits back awaiting the most calculated titillation of the senses and the most subtle whipping up of emotional excitations at the hands of a real expert!

If, then, we consider Whitman and Poe as the most persistent polarities in American poetry, it would be possible to sift our American poets, as Matthiessen suggested, into the descendants of Whitman and those of Poe. And quite a large number of the lesser ones will pitch their humble tents somewhere between Poe's isolate castle and Whitman's No Man's Land. Both have been vitally influential. If the Whitman tribe has its Sandburgs and its Thomas Wolfes, the "New" poets have followed Poe's lead in many ways. Quite apart from the impact felt through his French disciples of the Symbolist movement, Poe's influence has received the weighty and very prestigious support of Eliot as well as that of Pound. For, despite Pound's grudging recognition of Whitman, there would be little doubt, as to his true affiliations if we were to examine the evidence of his own poetry.

It is not really a question of assigning the poets to the Whitman camp or the Poe camp. We should rather want to know if a strong pre-occupation with craft such as Poe stood for has not affected the practice of the new poets and in a way diminished their poetic achievement. The poetry of Pound, great though it is, at its best as in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly*, has suffered from that limitation. His interest in Imagism or Ideogram has the effect of making his poems monuments of artifice remote to that immediacy of response, that ready contact with the poet's mind and experience that great poetry must secure. The artifice, instead of aiding that contact, might become a screen that divides. And with the passage of time perhaps this feeling of estrangement may grow even stronger.

This is largely true also of the poets of the movement Eliot and Pound inspired. Since they accepted the adage: "A poem should not mean but be" quite seriously, it was never what the poem says that mattered but what it is in strictly aesthetical terms, as though *value* could reside in the rendering quite in-

dependently of what is rendered. And though these poets have had beautiful perceptions, and often conveyed an effect of beautifully poised intelligence, it is clear that the spirit of Poe is at large and has affected their work in varying degrees. The verse of the poet-critics like Ransom and Tate largely answers their own prescription for complexity and it is not for nothing that Tate referred to Poe as "our cousin Mr. Poe." In one respect, at any rate, this affiliation is conspicuous. Each seems to feel the compulsion to create not just poems but a language. And for the most part their virtuosity seems to be in excess of what is conveyed.

Thus Williams expertly develops the music native to American speech and acquires something of Pound's power of a musical interweaving of themes and images. A Wallace Stevens derives inspiration more from the formal than the emotional aspect of his art, making the poetic process itself the prime subject. A Cummings, that bad boy of American poetry, expends his delighted ingenuity in forcing us to a poetic response by the delicate dislocation of typography and grammar, while all the time remaining at heart a rather old-fashioned romantic egotist. No wonder Robert Frost quipped: "Poetry was tried without punctuation. It was tried without capital letters. It was tried without any image but those to the eye. It was tried without content under the name of 'poesie pure.' It was tried without phrase, epigram, coherence, logic, and consistency. It was tried without feeling or sentiment." In other words, it became a question of a bag of tricks and it made little difference whether we replaced that pejorative description with the more acceptable term "aesthetic devices."

The question is: When does the bag of tricks become aesthetic device, or artifice become art? We seek a certain kind of harmony of form with what is conveyed, a situation in which the form refuses to call attention to itself. This is inevitably a matter of the total impression a writer's work makes upon a sensitive and uncommitted reader. There is no other guide—no calculus nor testing mechanism. When it is art and not artifice, it is transparent and actually enriches our absorption in the image of the poet's mind and in the image of the object set before us. This is also the recurring question of literature.



rary tradition and experiment. The poet is a man speaking to men; both the speaker and listener function in a tradition initially. It is only when the poet finds that the accepted mode of poetic communication becomes obstructive that he is impelled to innovate. But he must be so compelled; and what compels him leaves its stamp and pressure on what he innovates. The formal innovation should be itself meaningful in that it bears a certain relation to the novelty of the thought, the feeling, the sensibility it conveys and not be something extraneous to it. The technique should be significant of what occasions it. In one word, it must be "organic."

The obstructive character of technique has caused debate in the fields of drama and novel, for instance, around figures like O'Neill and Hemingway. One wonders if O'Neill's experimental interest in masks and expressionist devices has not depleted his characters, reducing them to marionettes, to certain elemental urges, animated symbols rather than persons. That is the source of our uneasiness even with a masterpiece like *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The moral compulsions that motivate actions of men seem replaced by certain dark subterranean Freudian forces. That is germane to the technique; but technique seems to be in the place of arbiter. In that process a hollow is left behind and the moral vacuity interferes with the intended tragic effect and significance of the whole action. And this is all the more sharply exposed to our attention because of the Greek mould into which the action is cast.

The case of Hemingway is even more instructive. We ask: How far is the famous Hemingway style really "organic"? There is no doubt at all that the style he fashions out for himself—more or less on the prescription of Gertrude Stein—is an extremely skilful affair. He pares the language to the dry bones till it gives rise to certain wry effects which are cleverly employed. In fact this technical interest is so absorbing that some have thought it to be merely an "effect of style." "He has conjured up an *effect* of style by a process of evasion, very much as he sets up an aura of emotion—by walking directly away from emotion!" (Leon Edel.) It is as though one expected the technique to transform the banality of what is conveyed. And what is conveyed is something purely negative. Life is essen-

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tially meaningless and valueless. The only momentary escape is sex; drink or killing. Hemingway was probably in Faulkner's mind when in his Nobel Prize Award speech he cautioned against the kind of writer who "writes not of life but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and worst of all without pity or compassion . . . he writes not of hearts but of glands. . . ."

Others have seen a perfect correspondence of form and content. The style is revealed as a "precise instrument of implication" with a kind of packed irony in the interstices of its muted statements. Some, like Robert Penn Warren, analysing the "structure" of the Hemingway world, have shown how drink and sex are dramatised as forces that dull the sense of *nada* (death and meaninglessness of the physical world) except when, with love, a margin of significance is achieved. The hard, bare, simplified style is seen to be the proper expression of the inner structure. That may be reading too great a subtlety in Hemingway altogether, but the point is, the formal innovation must itself contribute to that inner structure, stand in a kind of synergic relation to it to qualify as art and not artifice or mere mannerism.

In poetry, at any rate, the dominant trend has appeared to be towards an exalting of artifice. To balance that comment, and also by way of conclusion, one could point to at least two poets in whom conspicuous peculiarity of technique conveys significance, in whom what appears mere mannerism or whimsy is really an expression of an attitude to life or a personal philosophy in action—I mean Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost. The New Critics perhaps have not been enthusiastic about either of them. Nevertheless, we recognise in their art a closing of the gap between the idea of the poem and the image of the poet. And each has a strongly individualistic manner. That of Frost, the synecdochist, as he called himself, is like the singing of his own oven-bird:

He knows in singing not to sing.  
The question that he frames in all but words  
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

And he makes of a poem a clarification of life and a "momentary stay against confusion." In the spinsterly mode of the other, we glimpse the agonized force of Calvinism and the ecstasy of a lone questing girl who sits in her domestic world, as she says,

Spreading wide my narrow hands  
To gather Paradise.

And she has her reward:

The only news I know  
Is bulletins all day  
From Immortality.

And those little bulletins of hers will last.

## NOTES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF JEWISH-AMERICAN LITERATURE

NARESH GUHA

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JEAN PAUL SARTRE is a friend of the Jewish people. But if we keep in mind the recent American scene in art and literature, it would be difficult to agree with him when he says that the Jews, by temperament as also owing to their peculiar historical situation, do not have the dimension of sensibility which is necessary for becoming creative artists. His argument is somewhat like this: Jews do not live in one country but all over the world, and wherever they live they do not really participate in the national feelings of the countries of their residence. They belong either to the big metropolitan cities where anonymity is not difficult to attain, or to the world of intellect which is only a world of abstractions. Neither of these conditions is conducive to that inclusive sensibility which finds expression in creative art. During the last fifty years or so this situation certainly has changed a great deal. A number of Jewish artists, painters, and creative writers have attained extraordinary prominence, particularly in the United States. They occupy a prominent place in American culture to-day. Any survey of American literature is sure to make us conscious of the number and importance of Jewish authors working there, even though Sartre, apparently, fails to take note of that phenomenon.

I do not want here to introduce the thorny problem whether there is any such thing as Jewish art and literature, unless of course we mean by that term art and literature created simply

by people of Jewish origin. And even if we share this rather practical definition, we should keep out of our consideration such questions as whether they regularly went to the synagogue or whether their Judaism has had any relation to what they have to communicate. The kind of Jewish-American literature I have in mind does not call our attention to it simply because Jewish subject matter probably has been depicted in it. In creative art the subject matter is, after all, not of any supreme importance, whereas the style is, or, to use a modern term, the "form" is. That part of American literature I am thinking of may or may not have Jewish subject matter in it, though usually it has, but is the expression of a sensibility that is cosmopolitan though retaining at the same time its Jewish-American identity. I would like to call this sensibility "modern." The writers I am thinking of could not naturally keep their deepest racial experience as Jews out of their work. No one can. But by the alchemy of creative talent they transformed that experience in such a way that ironically it has come to stand for the experience of all modern men wherever they may live, to illuminate the deepest concern of all of us here and now, and to underline the human situation of this century. The Jewish experience, as is known to all, refers to their profound suffering and meaningless persecution through the centuries in various parts of the Old World from where in wave after wave they desperately emigrated to the New. The history of this emigration could be of some interest. The first group of Jewish refugees that entered North America were twenty-three in number, came from Brazil, were of Spanish-Portuguese origin, and settled at New Amsterdam in New York. That was only thirty years after the famous *Mayflower* emigrants had arrived to settle in the new colony. Thus in 1654 began the flow of the Sephardic Jews which practically continued till the thirties of the last century. Many of them came via Holland, England, and the West-Indies, and settled in towns along the Atlantic seaboard. The second recognizable group of emigrants came during the next fifty years, till about 1881, from smaller towns of South Germany. The next wave was from Eastern European countries, particularly from Czarist Russia. These were people who could flee the massacre and humilia-

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tion of Russian "pogroms" or "devastation." Wholesale massacre and plundering of unoffending Jews, or Jew-baiting as a popular pastime, had become a common enough practice in Russia at the turn of the century. In 1905-6, for example, infamous pogroms occurred in 64 cities and 624 towns and villages in Russia, as a result of which at least 810 known deaths were counted. The emigrants who escaped to the New World could hardly forget these persecutions, ghettos, and pogroms which existed even after the legal emancipation of the Jews in Western Europe. The modern wave of emigration began around 1936. This time at least one hundred and fifty thousand people came in ten years from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, having been pushed out by totalitarian discrimination and persecution.

In these four major waves of emigration a vast number of Jews of various national backgrounds assembled in the cities and towns of the United States. Roughly speaking, they form a quarter of the entire Jewish population of the world, though in the United States they are not more than four per cent of the total population. Here they found themselves in the huge melting pot of a new nation in the making. Large cities like New York and Philadelphia were the places where they concentrated, and today they are represented in all forms of business and professional activity in that country. They publish a large number of periodicals and journals including *The Partisan Review* and *Commentary*. Quite a few of these journals are in Yiddish, which is based on dialectal German. The Jew as a distinctly American figure has been so firmly established today that their contribution in every branch of activity in American life is quite proudly recognised.

This acceptance of the Jew as a distinctly American figure, did not, however, come through quite so easily. People like Mark Twain no doubt were very friendly to Jews. Twain, for example, spiritedly protested against Russian pogroms, and is reported once to have quipped that Jews were members of the human race and "that is the worst you can say about them." But all the same, painful discrimination and anti-Semitic attitudes continued to be quite common and effective till the end of World War I. The result was that the Jews remained Jews and were not assimilated. Even in the late twenties of this cen-

tury, the Jewish students at Harvard could not quite ignore disturbing sense of exclusion all around, and to fight this condition they established the Menorah Society with a group of young Jewish "intellectuals." Lionel Trilling, himself a Jew, thus tells of the situation when he was a young man:

Eliot Cohen (the managing editor of the *Menorah Journal*), after a brilliant undergraduate career at Yale had given up the graduate study of English because he believed that as a Jew he had no hope of a University appointment. When I decided to go into academic life, my friends thought me naive to the point of absurdity, nor were they wholly wrong—my appointment to an instructorship in Columbia College was pretty openly regarded as an experiment, and for sometime my career in the college was complicated by my being Jewish. As compared to some anti-Semitic situations that have prevailed this was certainly not an extreme one, but it had sufficiently bad effect upon the emotional lives of many who experienced it. Jews who wanted to move freely in the world were easily led to think of their Jewishness as nothing but a burden. (From Introduction to the new reprint of Tess Slesinger's only novel, *The Unpossessed*, 1934. See *Commentary*, May 1966.)

Out of this situation it was difficult for any Jewish creative writer of any consequence to rise. He simply could not yet feel that he belonged or that he was being accepted by the society. Alfred Kazin, in a recent article in the Australian Journal *Quadrant* (1966), has suggested that this situation did radically change so that the Jews could really share for the first time the common experience on an equal footing only after the success of Jewish clowns, minstrels and song-writers in the vaudeville theatre, music house and burlesque houses. There were excellent clowns in the Marx Brothers, for example, or a fine comedian in Eddie Cantor. The Russian-born actor-singer Al Jolson became famous in the first successful motion picture called *The Jazz Singer*. Another member of this fine group of entertainers was the Brooklyn-born American-Jewish composer George Gershwin, who wrote scores for the folk-opera *Porgy and Bess*

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(1935) as well as for *An American in Paris*. They were not literary creators, but they certainly did prepare the American mind for accepting the Jew as a distinctly American figure—strangers no longer, “eating kosher, and saved from the drowning they deserve,” as Henry Adams said.

In the early thirties of this century, a new phenomenon in the Jewish-American scene, the Jewish “Intellectuals,” arose. They no longer belonged to the religious, Judaistic culture of the orthodox Jews who were happily indifferent to whatever was happening all over the world, particularly in Western Europe. The Jewish “Intellectuals” firmly stood for social “progress” or socialism, philosophical rationalism, and cultural humanism. This was on the whole a serious groping for modern values. I shall quote Lionel Trilling again since he himself shared in this unprecedented change in the Jewish sensibility in the thirties of this century. The idea of Jewishness was no doubt the common link among them all, but, says Trilling:

This had nothing to do with religion; we were not religious. It had nothing to do with Zionism; we were inclined to be skeptical about Zionism and even opposed it and during the violence that flared up in 1929 some of us were on principle pro-Arab. Chiefly our concern with Jewishness was about what is now called authenticity.

The result was of far reaching consequences:

When it came to the Jewish present, we undertook to normalize it by suggesting that it was not only as respectable as the present of any other group but also as foolish, vulgar, complicated, impossible, and promising. . . . To write our endless reviews of Jewish books, directing our satire at the sodden piety so many of them displayed, to tease Jewish life, . . . to write vivacious stories of modern sensibility in which the protagonists were Jewish, . . . was to help create a consciousness that could respond to the complexities of the Jewish situation with an energetic unabashed intelligence. . . . We had found a way of supposing that society was actual and that we were in some relation to it. If the anti-Semitism that



we observed did not arouse our indignation, that was in part because we took it to be a kind of advantage; against this social antagonism we could define ourselves and our society, we could discover who we were and who we wished to be. It helped to give life the look of reality. (*Commentary*, May 1966.)

One could perhaps call this situation a latter-day Renaissance—not only a revolt against existing standards of value, but a resuscitation of creative energy that had lain dormant for so many centuries. If we call this situation the American-Jewish Renaissance, then this phenomenon almost coincided with another important American phenomenon which has been described as the “end of American innocence” which happened during World War I, though the war was not its sole cause. Let me explain.

America had so far been enjoying an isolated security. The disturbing and troublesome problems of the Old World did not so far dare to annoy her. An indomitable optimism was being shared by everyone who counted for anything in America. This outlook was conditioned not only by a faith in moral judgment but at the same time by a trust in inevitable “progress” and a reliance on the ultimate triumph of the traditional culture. The champions of moralism, progress, and culture retained their stronghold in the universities, publishing houses, important journals, and in all centres of serious opinion, though winds of change had been blowing in countries on the other side of the Atlantic. But ideas have wings, and the American Garden of Eden also could not shut them out. Her children came to relish the forbidden fruits in the shape of disturbing European ideas and literature. The students of Harvard, of that seat of American nineteenth-century culture, came, for example, to be contaminated by the “disastrous consequences of Romantic revolt”—namely Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine. The irony is that the person who was mainly responsible for this contamination was Irving Babbitt, whose firm intention was to turn everybody from that source of disaster. The result was that many intelligent students of Harvard came to question for the first time the soundness of contemporary civilization, though the official

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complacency was never greater. Ideas of change cannot have come exclusively from outside, from the evil world beyond the ocean, but it is true that the literary and philosophical influence of Europe reached a peak in the years immediately before the war. Zola and Flaubert, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Maupassant and Ibsen, were being avidly consumed. Nietzsche was introduced with all his revolt against nineteenth-century ideas of progress and morality. The Armory Show at Chicago of modern painting from Europe, in 1913, was greeted with phenomenal response. Mabel Dodge described the occasion as the most important event in America since 1776. Intellectuals and creative writers were being increasingly drawn in greater numbers to cities like Chicago and New York where they encountered two very exciting new worlds. "One was," writes Henry F. May in *The End of American Innocence: The First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-17* (1959), "the young literary and artistic world which had sprung into existence in the shadow of the old centres of polite culture, a world suddenly complete with its own theatres, galleries, publishers, customs, and leaders. The other was the world of the American radical movement. At the intersection of these two, the intellectuals created the most typical and important expression of the pre-war rebellion."

Add to this the development of faster automobiles, aeroplanes, movies, new dances, new costumes for women, birth control, and militant feminism among others, and the picture is almost complete. Compared with the complexities of this new life the complacency of the previous generation seems to be that of sheer adolescence.

I have tried to indicate then that this oft-lamented finale of American Innocence coincided by an inevitable turn of events with what I have called the latter-day Renaissance of American Jewry. Like any other intellectuals of America at that time, and perhaps with more vehemence and ebullience because of their peculiar historical situation the Jewish intellectuals quickly shed the prevailing innocent complacency of mind. They became disturbed, and came to realize not merely the sad plight of the Jews of the world, which was real enough, but also became involved in the greater exploration of the total human situation with its systematic denial of the freedom of mind and

imagination. The Jewish experience was felt to have ironically become the general human experience. They not only became aware of the disquieting world created by the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, both of whom incidentally were Jews, but also the very complex pattern of the world created by such enlighteners of our times as Dostoevsky, Baudelaire, Kafka, Valery, and James Joyce.<sup>1</sup> The pathetic glory of the nineteenth-century sun had set never to rise again. The world had changed, or at least our responses to it had changed. The idea of a simple moral conflict between good and evil of olden days could no longer satisfactorily explain our predicament. Our existence came to be recognized as brutal, and an Eliot described our contemporary history as "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy." Known answers to all human queries appeared to be full of contradictions, and any search for the Truth became riddled with extreme difficulties since truth no longer seemed to be a gift from above or from outside. The result was that we came to resemble restless voyagers and wanderers who must try to establish their individual identity since truth can be expected only from the inviolate self. Power was corrupt, society antagonistic, prosperity futile. Suffering of the wise and humble, and self-denial of the humiliated are perhaps the minimum price of this voyage of discovery. Baudelaire realized this predicament much ahead of our time, right in the middle of the last century, at a time when the Golden Age was officially announced to be only at the next turning of the road. Here are a few lines from Baudelaire's poem "The Voyage":

What bitter knowledge one gets from travelling! The monotonously small to-day, yesterday, to-morrow, always, makes us see our own likeness: an oasis of horror in a desert of boredom!

<sup>1</sup> After this article had been written I found the following supporting comment in Leslie Fiedler: "America's recent entry into world culture is, of course, by no means the accomplishment of Jewish-American writers alone but surely they have played a key role in presenting to non-Americans living images of our contemporary life, while naturalizing for Americans certain ideas originally European—the doctrines, for instance, of Freud and Marx, Sartre and Camus and Martin Buber, Jung and Fraser and Wilhelm Reich." (*Waiting for the End*.)

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Must we depart? Or stay? If you can stay, stay; depart if you must. One man runs and another crouches to trick the sinister watchful enemy: Time! Alas, there are some runners who can take no rest, like the Wandering Jew and like the apostles, for whom nothing, neither coach nor ship, suffices to flee this infamous retiar; there are others who can kill time without leaving their cradle.

The sole prayer then of this Baudelairean Voyager is:

Pour us your poison to comfort us! This fire burns our brains so, that we want to plunge to the bottom of the gulf, Hell or Heaven, what does it matter? To find something *new* in the depth of the unknown!

You will notice that the image of the Wandering Jew has not been used in this poem merely to indicate the Jewish plight, but that of the whole of mankind. The image of the restless proverbial Jew as also that of a troubled figure in search of his identity, in search of his true father, have become two of the most potent symbols of modern literary expression. Dublin's one-day epic by James Joyce uses these two great modern symbols in Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, one the Wandering Jew, our "Everyman and No-man," the lonely, pathetic, suffering figure standing for the father image to the other. The conception about protagonists has changed a great deal in our century. The old-fashioned heroes are hard to come across, which was only to be expected in an age when experts at international gatherings predict: "Whatever a human being can do an appropriate machine can do too." The protagonists of our new literature have, therefore, come to be called anti-heroes, our Don Quixotes on their rickety Rocinantes, and bound by loyalty to their sweet great imaginary ladies—the little Dulcianas of our private Tobosos.

I have made this rather wide detour only to put the Jewish-American writers in their proper perspective—writers who are conscious of their Jewishness with a difference. They have agreed courageously to face our modern age of "grim threats and endless lamentations," the age of anguish, and of anxiety that

"hangs like dry electricity in the atmosphere," an age which presents "a continued affront to man." Victimization, rebellion, and alienation—these are the vital issues of our time, and conscious involvement in these issues indicates what can be called modern sensibility. This is not to suggest that out of this involvement come uniform responses. Responses may, and perhaps should, vary from person to person. And yet what holds them together, as distinct from others who are determined to remain complacent, to hold on to their innocence however blighted it might have been, is this common sharing of the modern sensibility. The Jewish-American writers of any maturity have this quality common among them.

They were just coming of age in the thirties of this century, but the necessary crystallization of their immediate experience was as yet incomplete, racial memory of senseless persecution raw. Their literary vigour was, therefore, spent in trying to tell their own hard stories in fitful spurts. Their own bitterness, or poverty, or prevailing anti-Semitism cut short their careers. Many of these early Jewish-American writers, like Henry Roth, were theoretically committed to Marxian ideology, though in their imaginative writings they, more or less successfully, avoided the pat Marxian formula of class conflict and the final victory of the proletarian revolution. The best introduction to their work would be Leslie Fiedler's *Waiting for the End*, first published in 1964. In less than a quarter of a century it is true, books like *Call It Sleep* by Henry Roth, *Jewish without Money*, by Michael Gold, *Summer in Williamsburg*, by David Huchs, *The Chute* by Albert Halper, or *Waiting for Lefty*, by Clifford Odets, have already become pale tentative blooms of another year. All the same it was a good beginning, and in recent years some of these books have been "rediscovered" mainly by the university intellectuals. Then in the forties rose the Jewish "Intellectuals" who finally gave a stability to the amorphous situation. Many of them are quite well known today, even in the non-English speaking countries, not because there is anything specifically Jewish about them, but because they are writers of imaginative excellence, and intellectual distinction. They include Delmore Schwartz, Lionel Trilling, Leslie Fiedler, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Karl Shapiro,

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Harold Rosenberg, Lionel Abel, Irving Howe, Philip Rahv, Paul Goodman, Philip Roth, and Isaac Rosenfeld. Alfred Kazin in the same article I have already quoted from has this comment to make on these mature, sophisticated Jewish-American writers of the forties:

Whether they were novelists or just intellectual pundits at large, what these writers all had in common was the ascendancy of "modern literature," which has been more destructive of bourgeois standards than Marxism, was naturally international minded, and in a culture bored with middle-class rhetoric, upheld the primacy of intelligence and freedom of imagination... Unlike so many earlier writers, who had only their hard story to tell, and then departed, the Jewish "intellectuals" who emerged in the '40s found shelter under the wide wings of the "modern movement," and so showed an intellectual spirit that Jews had not always managed in the great world

Before I conclude, I shall briefly consider two novels, *The Adventures of Augie March* by Saul Bellow, and *The Assistant* by Bernard Malamud, not with the intention of showing their differences so much as to indicate how the American-Jewish experience has been utilised in both to illuminate in their own ways the modern human predicament.

In Saul Bellow's novel the central character is a poor growing Jewish boy, Augie March, whose parents were not much to him, and who had an Odessa-born grandmother, a victim of a Russian pogrom, as the presiding deity of the impoverished family. The story of the life of this strange boy is a series of misadventures. He lives through the bleak years of Depression. Everyone wants to help him, and give him a start in life only if he would accept their notion of a successful life. He refuses to submit to these temptations, and continues to resist the prevailing notion of success at the cost of poverty, distress, desolation, and spiritual disquiet. Though he does not clearly know what exactly he wants to become, his pattern of saying "No" and of making rejections define his aim in a negative way.

What was he going to do in life? "Oh—something. I hope something interesting." And to discover this worthwhile something he chooses to remain a wary traveller through life's ways with a determination to keep himself in touch with "Truth, love, beauty, usefulness, harmony." With a sense of great humility he is ready to serve life and goes away to gain his identity and his right of communication with others on equal terms. "I wasn't proud of myself, believe me," says Augie, "and my stubbornness about a 'higher independent fate' . . . I wasn't slated to find the answer to all my shams like Jean Jacques (Rousseau) on his way to Vincennes sinking down with emotion of the conception that evil society is to blame for all that happened to, warm, impulsive, loving me. The one thing I could say was that though I wanted this independent fate it wasn't merely for my own sake I wanted it." Born in a post-Romantic era he finds the Romantic rejection untenable, and even then continues to remain uncommitted, though troubled—lonely, suffering man, determined to fall in love with the crowd. Augie is a modern Wandering Jew in search of his identity—not as a Jew, but as a human being. His dilemma is neither personal nor racial.

Malamud's protagonist, Frank Alpine, on the other hand, is a gentle, anti-Semitic stranger among poor Jews in New York. He is bad, but very ill at ease with himself or with anything that life represents. He always seems to be under stress, sighs much, and mutters inaudibly to himself. The image of St. Francis haunts him at awkward moments. His mother died when he was too young, his father deserted him before long, and he was raised in an orphan home from where he ran away again and again with a vague dream of a better life. He comes to this purgatorial neighbourhood to take part in a senseless anti-Semitic persecution, but then something in the character of the victim, Maurice Bober, casts a charm on his soul. In a depressed mood he returns later seeking to be an assistant of his poor victim. The symbolic value of this gesture can hardly be missed. From this honest, weak, suffering and still-hoping Jew who has willingly buried himself in his humble work for the family, Frank seeks to learn the experience of running a small store which some day he himself might own, and where

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he could be his own boss. The pathetic story of this strange apprenticeship gradually takes the shape of a great human myth until Frank comes to realise: "Suffering is like a piece of goods. I bet the Jews could make a suit of clothes out of it. The other funny thing is that there are more of them around than anybody knows about."

Here is an American Stephen Dedalus in search of his father in the Jew who is by no means a copy-book saint but a complex and substantial human being.

Apparently, there is not much in common between the two novels. But only apparently, since both in their distinctive ways illuminate the anxiety-ridden sad plight in which we find ourselves in this century, and raise the central question: what should one do and how should one face this situation? And both carry this conviction that, however bleak and unfriendly this situation might prove itself to be, there still would be left some little hope if the sad, silly Don Quixote in us refuses to surrender till the end. Jewish-American literature, by and large, like any significant literature of our times, offers this subtle technique of survival. To say that much is to say a great deal about the achievement of Jewish-American writers of today. Whoever is interested in the development of modern fiction, would do well to ignore what people like Jean Paul Sartre may have to say, and take careful note of what Jewish-American authors have done and may do in future, because they have not as yet exhausted their possibilities.





## THE HUMAN IMAGE IN MODERN AMERICAN DRAMA

T. R. DUTTA

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ONE OF the most compelling images of modern man is projected in Robinson's "The Man against the Sky" (1916), in which the poet describes a figure seen on a hilltop against the sunset sky. The figure symbolizes mankind, facing chaos and struggling for the comprehension of a point of order in it. The contemplative discourse of Robinson's poem implicates the human consciousness in the diverse modes of philosophy, mysticism, common-sense and emotion, none of which is found adequate to recover the central harmony of vision lost in the looming darkness ahead. Modern man strikes the poet's imagination

As if he were the last god going home  
Unto his last desire.

Another equally powerful image of modern man is revealed in Robert Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1923). The man in the poem is enthralled and momentarily arrested by the beautiful scene before him; but, after the momentary stay provided by the beauty of nature against the confusions of civilization, his consciousness reveals to itself the sheer human necessity to go forth and keep the promises. The American imagination in the present century, in its conceptions of the struggle of the human will with the magisterial drives of universal law, has oscillated between these two central images of man, one of idealism and despair and the other of strife and

promise. The American dramatists, in particular, have been directly committed to the delineation of human conflict in terms of man's capacity to control the chaos and the disorder he has himself created. Necessarily, they seem to have come to the belief that man must somehow be able to guarantee, or resuscitate, the force of will which can conquer the chaos and disorder surrounding it. In the final analysis, then, modern American drama is the symbolic chronicle of the human struggle for survival and 'prevalence', for identity and purpose, for meaning and promise.

The dramatization of this central humanistic consideration has led the playwrights to new experimentations with the dramatic form as well as the common thematic strategy of trying out the patterns of conflict and correlation between the human self and the human consciousness. The plunge into the abyss of the self as recorded by these writers is no less heroic and meaningful than the battles fought by the soldiers on the field. The outer conflicts of man having lost their dramatic poignancy with the passage of social realism in drama, the tensions within the human consciousness have assumed a greater significance in the art of drama. Similarly, the fresh enthusiasms of depth psychology having become so attenuated as to render them incapable of registering the stimulations and tensions within man's inner world, a certain transcendental extension of the dramatic frontier has also come to be witnessed in modern American drama. In the result, the central energy of the dramatic imagination and its divergent lines of force have re-oriented themselves towards a new symbolic drama. This factor accounts for a spiritual analyst like O'Neill, a social realist like Miller, a psychological agonist like Williams, and a metaphysical prophet like Wilder, all eventually transforming themselves into symbolic dramatists.

The major American dramatists reveal their understanding of the human situation and their varying degrees of commitment to the existence and the destiny of man within the framework of symbolism and the strategy of selfhood. In pointing to the helplessness of modern man, they also describe in dramatic terms the goals of man and his values, and the consequent adjustment of the modes of human selfhood. O'Neill explores

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the ambivalence of the human consciousness and, in doing so, he establishes the validity of the human self not so much as a bearer of experience as the receiver of grace. Miller presents the terrible negativeness of society and history, and yet offers the ultimate human self as the redeemer and transformer, and, also, when need be, the creator, of its own social and historical environment. Williams traces the ordeal of the human psyche in its battles against ugliness and despair and violence and treachery; but, finally, he affirms the capacity of human selfhood to master the confusions of passion through the prevalence of all awareness of beauty, which transforms the universe, even as a finished poem does, into a thing of beauty and joy. Wilder's aesthetic strategy brings about dramatically a number of successive affirmations. By merging the individual into the cosmic scene, he extends his historical personality into the evolutionary dimension, thus affirming through the cancellation of time the notion of Eternity. He affirms consciousness through the abolition of the self, even as by telescoping the former, he affirms the cosmic selfhood of a permanent, aggregate, comprehensive, generic human personality. It is, thus, to be seen that these dramatists have come to affirm the worth and dignity of the human self as an instrument of the eventual positivism of the human experiment. Plays such as *The Iceman Cometh*, *After the Fall*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *The Milk Train*, *J. B.*, and *Gideon* seem to be apparently the dramatizations of man's indignation against the universe. But a closer scrutiny of these works reveals a subtle but unmistakable affirmation of the self and the universe.

Through their varying artistic intentions and commitments, the American dramatists seem to address the world in a manner urged by James Thurber: "In this light, let's not look back in anger or forward in fear, but around in awareness." (Foreword, *Lanterns and Lances*, 1960). Their emphasis is on the needs of human individuality and on the demand of human personality. The traumas of the self distort the images of reality, which leads to the dramatic conflict in many American plays. The twisted self looks in anger or fear, in hope or despair, as long as it is not set right by the healing touch of an enhanced human awareness of the universe at large.

*The Iceman Cometh* is such an instance. Larry and Hickey

have their selfhoods so contaminated that their illusions have no redemptive power. But, as the dramatic action progresses, the systems of their selfhood come under the power of aroused human consciousness. The members of the party and particularly Parritt, the young man, over whose initiation they have the role of the high priests of salvation, represent a strange tragic fraternity. Larry has immobilized his consciousness absolutely, as he thinks, but his essential charity is forced out of his reluctant self at the painful dawn of truth, when the closed system of his selfhood is unlocked and his whole being is shaken by the awareness of a universe beyond his illusion. The presence of truth holds the key to the chamber of consciousness temporarily sealed by the artifices of selfhood. Once the self is opened up, the pervasive currents of the life outside flow into Larry's consciousness and this conversion transforms him into a fit, if ironic, in the dramatic context, saviour for the soul of Parritt.

Similarly, in *After the Fall*, Arthur Miller's autobiographical protagonist Quentin acquires the almost religious power to redeem himself and alter his own hopeless situation in the direction of clarity, promise and understanding, by his self surging towards the introspective currents of consciousness, until the origins of his failure are traced back, in memory, time, and myth, to "man's first disobedience" and the consequent loss of Eden. The sense of relation between facts and events, between the present and the past, between human individuality and the structure of the universe, gives the hero the feeling of his own connection and interrelatedness to all life and existence, and this moment of luminous self-consciousness transforms the field of travail into the paradise of regained faith and affirmation.

A third example yet may be found in Tennessee Williams' *The Milk Train*, which despite its Broadway failure, marks a logical culmination of his aesthetic exploration of the human need for love and beauty and fulfilment. In the preceding play, *The Night of the Iguana*, the poet, Nonno, completes his poem, which, as an aesthetic artifact, parallels God's universe, and the completed poem is applied, as it were, to the specific malaise of Mrs. Goforth in *The Milk Train*. Mrs. Goforth is a feminine version of Miller's Quentin, and, like him, she too goes over her past, crystallizing her memories into her memoirs until she

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realizes the moment of her redemption, which coincides with the moment of her dispossession by the poet. The obstinate, reluctant, and almost petrified self is penetrated by the visionary integrity of the poet's consciousness, and her own consciousness flowers forth into the sunshine of reality. Here, again, the obduracy of the closed self, which forebodes the cancellation of consciousness, is liberated into the fulfilling domain of freedom.

The power of consciousness to redeem the human self through the revelation and recognition of truth is also emphasized by Wilder in *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Man survives the glacial catastrophes and the fortuitous chances and accidents of history and evolution by his capacity for knowledge and his incessant pursuit of the recovery of knowledge. Even as in ancient mythology, the recovery of the *Vedas* from the dark, demonic forces constitutes the beginning of a new genesis after the deluge, so too in Wilder's play the human experiment is restarted through the discovery of the alphabet and the wheel, one the symbol of individual survival and the other that of eternal generic 'prevalence' in terms of immutable law. (*Veda* = knowledge; *Rita* = law).

The next step in the self's journey into consciousness must inevitably take the dramatist's imagination directly into the realm of religious experience. *Lazarus Laughed* and *Days without End*, on the one hand, and *J. B.* and *Gideon*, on the other, have been symptomatic of this overflow of the "self" theme into the religious frontier. While O'Neill's plays achieve religious affirmation through the human consciousness being transcended and the human self being abnegated, the plays of MacLeish and Chayefsky, *J. B.* and *Gideon*, attempt to achieve religious affirmation through an enhancement of the human consciousness and the corresponding preservation of the self.

The dialectic of self and consciousness, furthermore, follows a consistent pattern in modern American drama. The interaction between the self and consciousness, which is offered for dramatization by the writers, traces for itself a kind of symbolic preparation towards a point of final communication. The self is posited in the world and exposed to its influences and pressures. As the ordeal of the human self reaches its moment of poignant

intensity, the human consciousness is manufactured into experience and extended through the cycle of conflict and compromise. The twin testings of the self and the consciousness converge upon a common focus—the revelation and recognition of truth. The connection between them is restored; and their reciprocity brings about the sense of harmony or understanding within the human personality. The dramatic metabolism of characters such as Larry and Parritt, Mrs. Goforth, Sabina, Quentin, J. B. and Gideon, underlines the symbolic “journey-work” of the self and the consciousness towards an assurance of human renewal.

Modern American dramatists are primarily artists, and not social or religious proselytes, or even philosophers of ideas. Their work in no way pretends to be a substitute for social action or religious belief. Nevertheless, drama must, as all art must, address itself to the totality of human existence, and in the process take all human knowledge, all human experience, all human vision to be its legitimate province. The American dramatists have turned to social theory, psychology, natural science, and religion only in order to dramatize the intimations of the particular disciplines in the pluralistic world of modern man. The first and last commitment of the American dramatists has been to their art, in the sense that they seize the significant essence of several orders of insight afforded by contemporary knowledge and then dramatize the formation of human character, or the crystallization of the human self, or the enhancement of the human consciousness. In other words, they are intensely aware of the dramatic core of modern life, which is the human image.

Art is supposed to hold the mirror up to nature; but, dramatic art must also hold a lamp up to contemporary reality. Modern American drama has attempted to illuminate, as well as reflect, the condition and predicament of man, revealing the areas of darkness and tension in modern life and modern consciousness, and the underlying spring of a purpose, an affirmation, and a possible assurance of harmony. Its quality of inward search and its intense exploratory nature have enabled modern American drama to step out of its confining theatrical walls, and walk back, as ultimately all drama should, into the open reality of life.

## NEW CRITICISM: AN ASSESSMENT\*

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH

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NEW CRITICISM, it is now embarrassing to say, is no longer new but quite old, respectable, indeed already part of the establishment. Like modern American poetry the New Criticism of America cannot be considered strictly within the bounds of the New World. The Old World has contributed to the making of it no less than the New though it is in the New that it took its shape. Its sponsors, exponents, and practitioners, both English and American, have made it a pervasive force in the 20th century.

John Crowe Ransom is usually credited with inventing the term. It is true that Ransom popularised the term when he published his *God Without Thunder* in 1930—one of the basic texts in New Criticism—and later a book of that title in 1941, but here as elsewhere the truism that every inventor has a predecessor holds good. The term had been used by Spingarn, Professor of Comparative Literature at Columbia, as early as 1910. The New Critic, he said in effect, must not concern himself with historical or social considerations; they are not relevant to the work of art and so he must address himself to the work before him. That is, he seemed to ask (and here is the snag): what did the author intend? has he realised it? Further, this is not what the author meant before the creative act, but

\* The paper has been developed from a talk given at the American Literature Workshop (at Mussoorie in 1962) at which Professor Spiller was present.



at the time of the creative process; and has he realised that? In other words, he put a high valuation on the author's intentions at the time of the creative process. In the first place, as Leavis informs us, intentions are nothing except as realised in the work of art. Then, what is the value of *intentions* even when they are actualized by means of words? This Spingarn didn't bother to find out. Even so he did a signal service in rescuing the work of art from considerations of it as sociological or historical study or as background material for the understanding of an age or country.

This was the time when literary radicals like Mencken were out to reject the literary standards which had made American writers subservient to England. They all said that literature to be authentic must be an expression of the society that produced it. They thought that America had come of age and American writers were great and they must be judged by nationalistic standards—whether that literature was authentically American,<sup>1</sup> and, in this case, whether they conform to the agrarian democratic system of Jefferson. American writers therefore stood or fell by this standard. Actually a revaluation took place. Writers like Cooper, Thoreau, Whitman and Twain went up and those like Poe, James, Lowell, and Longfellow came down; as Professor Spiller tells us, they “fell from grace.”<sup>2</sup>

The movement, naturally, invited a violent reaction from the Neo-Humanists. Men like Irving Babbitt who had acquired knowledge of the best classical and European critical thought in literature stressed the basic moral values of all times which had a universal, timeless appeal.

When this controversy or what is sometimes called the Great Debate was raging between the Literary Radicals and the Neo-Humanists, a third force was in the offing and this concerned itself with the work of art as embodied in words. In England Hulme had started a club in 1908 to discuss poetry and he was

<sup>1</sup> See Edgar Allan Poe, “Review of New Books”, in *Literary Criticism in America*, ed. Albert D. Van Nostrand (New York, 1957).

<sup>2</sup> Read Robert E. Spiller's “The Critical Discovery of America,” and, for a good summary on New Criticism, David Daiches's essay on the subject, both in *A Time of Harvest*, edited with an introduction by Robert E. Spiller (New York, 1962).

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the sworn enemy of the Romantics: "I hate the best of the romantics [it is good to recall that Matthew Arnold had paved the way for this extreme position]. I hate their whining and moaning." That was the time when W. B. Yeats, and Ezra Pound the American expatriate, had come in contact with the French Symbolists. Pound was deeply concerned with the betrayal of the word; his concern was how to call men and things by their true and proper names. After all, Pound was not the first American to have showed this concern. We have seen how throughout the 19th century from Edgar Allan Poe to Emily Dickinson, all the major writers—Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Lowell, and Whitman—were preoccupied with the question of artistic medium.

But it was in the first and early years of the second decade of this century when it was being discussed in England that even philosophical questions depended for their solution on semantics. It was then that the young John Crowe Ransom was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford—from 1910 to 1913. We don't know whether Ransom associated himself with Pound and others while in England but Pound's determination to break the word and free the thought, break the thought and free the thing, may have affected him favourably. That, one may guess, was also the time when W. B. Yeats showed (for a poet of his time) more than ordinary preoccupation with words—"words alone are certain goods," "the wandering earth" is but "a flaming word," he had written earlier.

It is these (one is not thinking of Yeats so much while considering the American scene) that represent the third force and they were weighed neither by nationalistic considerations nor by classical standards; the work of art in front of them was of paramount consideration. This was not new but as old as antiquity though in later years it came to be forgotten. Longinus in his celebrated essay *On the Sublime* takes a poem of Sappho and analyses it in the way Brooks or Blackmur might have done it. There were scattered efforts on the same lines by Sydney in his *Apology for Poetry* and by Dryden in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. And in the 19th century, Coleridge repeated the method in the *Biographia Literaria* much, one would guess, to the chagrin of Wordsworth. But they were more or less isolated

efforts and hadn't become a pervasive practice. When Pound and Eliot started writing criticism in the early years of this century they were accused of being "literary Bolsheviks" and Eliot simply said that they were "affirming forgotten standards" rather than setting up "new idols" even as Wordsworth and Coleridge were fighting the battles that Dryden and Pope had fought before.

Now the earliest to propound New Criticism was not I. A. Richards,<sup>3</sup> as some have supposed, or his pupil William Empson; not even Ransom, as some historians of criticism credit him with, but T. S. Eliot—a fact often ignored. It is here that dates are important. Richards's *Principles of Criticism* appeared in 1924; Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 1930; Ransom's *God without Thunder* in 1930; Allen Tate came even later : he was Ransom's pupil. But Eliot wrote one of his most seminal essays in criticism, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in 1917. With this and, earlier, by means of his poetry which he had started writing, as far as the adult world recognises, about 1909, he sowed the seeds of a revolution in criticism and poetry. Modern poetry and modern criticism are really the two sides of the same coin; each has nurtured the other. Eliot met the challenges of both the Literary Radicals and the Neo-Humanists. Like the latter he put the writer in tradition when he said that no poet, no artist has his complete meaning alone; he must have a sense of history from Homer down to the present day, for tradition, he said, is the means by which the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present. Richards was to say later in his *Principles of Literary Criticism* that nothing less than our sense of the whole history and destiny of man is involved in our judgment of any work of art. To come back to Eliot. He met the challenge of the Literary Radicals also when he upheld the importance of individual talent in a work of art. He said sensibility alters from generation to generation, but expression is altered only by a man of genius and went so far as to say that nothing that happens to a nation is so important as the revolution in its language.

<sup>3</sup> It is salutary to remember, however, that Richards was a teacher at Cambridge and must have practised practical criticism in the class room before he wrote his two books on criticism. He tells us so in the Preface to *Meaning of Meaning*.

To add to all this, he respected the integrity of the work of art. His stand amounted to this: the work of art is an object; it was there before you started reading it and will continue to be there long after you have finished reading it, and so look at it objectively. Don't *interpret* it, don't *judge*, but *elucidate* it in the "common pursuit of true judgment." How to do it? By means of Analysis and Comparison. Unfortunately since the new critic called the old one pedantic he was in his turn accused of being pedagogic. But it must have surely been the outcome of being penetrated into, analysed and laid bare<sup>4</sup>: "Human kind cannot bear very much reality."

This concern with words on the printed page is characteristic of every New Critic, Richards more than most others, thus giving one the impression that he is the father of New Criticism. His books, particularly *Meaning of Meaning*, stressed the distinction between the rational significance of the word and its emotional or associational impact—the referential and the emotive meanings. To Empson meaning is involved with structure or form down to the slightest connotation. His ambiguity was a deliberate device to find out how much words do carry. Ransom too looked for something concrete. He thought that emotions are intractable and are not legitimate subjects for critical discussion, far too imprecise for critical analysis and so he emphasized objects—it is the reverse of T. S. Eliot's theory of objective correlative. While Eliot starts with the emotion and finds its equivalence in objective correlative, Ransom starts with the objects and finds corresponding emotion. We may recall how he finds fault with Shelley's poetry for not giving concrete correlations to which emotions should attach themselves. He spoke of structure and texture in a work of art: structure belongs to the language of science and texture to the language of poetry. Allen Tate examines patterns of coherent relationships between denotative and connotative meanings in poetry. To him the Metaphysical poet is at the denotative end, and the Romantic poet at the connotative end, and he tries to push his meaning

<sup>4</sup> Read Eliot's essay "Frontiers of Criticism," 1956, in which he accused the analysts of belonging to the "Lemon-squeezer School of Criticism." Eliot lived to see, and warn against, the dangers, in inferior hands, of a method which he had so warmly commended in 1917.

towards the other end of the scale so as to cover the entire scale. Cleanth Brooks, who is said to be the best exemplar of the analytical approach, wrote in collaboration with Robert Penn Warren *Understanding Poetry* in 1938, and *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* in 1939. He approached English poetry from the point of imagery, symbolism, complexity of organization, irony and paradox. To him poetry is the language of paradox. Purge poetry of its paradox, what is left? Brooks would say: the language of science.

If of *The Waste Land* (and of Milton's twin poems "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso") Brooks has only given analysis and explication, in his *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, he not merely evaluates and re-evaluates poetry but makes several trenchant generalizations. But it is in R. P. Blackmur that we witness a "deeper and profounder meaning of language about which he writes at length in his rightly celebrated essay "Language as Gesture." It is not always analysis of workmanship but more than that—it is a matter of having insights and a system of values. What is it that irradiates the dead medium, ignites the cliché—stone, brick, clay, a lump of paint, sounds and words? That to Blackmur is gesture, though Ransom seems to think it is "more than gesture."

But what is important for our purpose is that all these New Critics addressed themselves to the work of art in front of them and did close reading of the text. As early as 1921, Eliot wrote that "honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but on his poetry." For the poet has given us a poem and not something else and to go to other things outside the poem except as an aid to illumination of the poem is to do him wrong. Simply put, it means that we go to a work of art as an aesthetic experience even as we go to the theatre to watch a play or listen to a concert and not to gather material about the lives of artists or to make a sociological diagnosis or to study the rise and fall of civilizations, though *all* these do emerge incidentally. But even a sociologist, we learn from Leavis (Spingarn made the same point in his "New Criticism" in 1910), is likely to get more out of a work of art, not by trying to abstract the data from poetry but by making the literary critic's kind of approach.

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Each new critic thus devised his own method to bring out the uniqueness of the poem : Richards his *emotive* and *referential* meanings, Empson his *ambiguity*, Ransom his *structure* and texture, Brooks his paradox, Warren his irony, Eliot his *objective correlative*, and Blackmur his *gesture*. Each critic has thus a master-metaphor in terms of which he views the critical function and how it shapes, informs, and makes the work meaningful. The one serious limitation is: what the method finds elusive remains unrevealed in criticism.

Now what did these critics do to win the attention to the writer's craft? They studied the old authors. Though they were Americans by and large, the authors they studied were English—from Donne and Shakespeare to Tennyson, *and* Sturge Moore, *and* such unknown quantities of Daryush. It is good to proceed chronologically to appreciate how they brought about revolutions in the history of English literature. It is a fact of history that America had no critical tradition: there was poetry, there was fiction, there was biography, but where was criticism except occasionally in by-products of poetry and fiction appearing as prefaces and letters? And so the American critics had to write about English literature which had been valued and revalued incessantly. It is interesting that none of the New Critics wrote about Chaucer, that fountain of good sense. Perhaps it is the linguistic difficulties that must have acted as a handicap to the study of Chaucer.

Shakespeare receives due attention at their hands. Shakespeare scholarship in the 19th century had unfortunately reduced itself to character-studies as is exemplified in the work of Hazlitt, Swinburne, and Bradley. It is in the 20th century that the whole play of Shakespeare began to be read in terms of scenes, situations, imagery, symbolism, word play, recurring themes and conventions, unity of conception, design and, above all, the way language organized itself in the plays and the poems. Never before for three hundred years had Shakespeare yielded such a rich harvest to scholars as well as to critics of the stage.

One notable achievement of New Criticism has been to pull down Milton from his high pedestal. We are familiar with the received formula of Shakespeare and Milton as the twin stars in the firmament of English literature. Milton like Shakespeare,

and in a sense more than Shakespeare (because while Shakespeare was seen on the stage few cared to read Milton), extorted the same superstitious reverence from scholars. The New Critics drew the attention of the world to the minority opinion against Milton during the three hundred years he has been read. Both Eliot (in his own poetry and in his first essay on Milton) and Leavis pointed to the superiority of the Metaphysical poets who wrote contemporaneously with Milton, and they demonstrated the pernicious influence of Milton over Dryden and Pope, the Romantics and the Victorians until at last an influential minority came to believe with Addison: "Our language sunk under him," and with Keats, who protested: "Life to Milton is death to me." T. S. Eliot's second essay on Milton, far from helping to rehabilitate Milton, invited critics to question Mr. Eliot's purity of interest and motivation for he did nothing to meet the arguments of Milton-detractors. The position remains the same to this day. As for Leavis, his castigation of Milton has yet to be answered satisfactorily.

Thanks to the New Critic and new poetry there has been a revival of interest in 17th century poetry. Ben Jonson's prophecy that Donne would perish for not being understood had almost come true, that is, in England. The American men of letters, though not the average reader, had always received stimulus and inspiration from the 17th century English poets. But there was no critical effort commending the acceptance of 17th century poetry. Eliot was probably the first (probably, because Grierson's efforts may not be ignored, at least in historical accounts) to win attention to Donne and the other Metaphysicals in a major way. Donne's "Valediction Forbidding Mourning" is today one of the prescribed poems for schoolboys in England and if undergraduates in Indian universities have come to read Donne we know whom to thank. Eliot's perceptive remarks on Donne could not have failed to receive the attention of the most obtuse among us. "A thought to Donne," said Eliot, "was an experience. It modified his sensibility." Poets and critics have prized this so much in modern poetry and in all better poetry. Thanks to Eliot, again, both Donne and Herbert have been elevated to major status and treated as belonging to and swelling the main stream of English poetry. It is the way that in an age of science and

scepticism the Metaphysicals could give expression to their spiritual aspirations by making use of scientific imagery that is of value to us and hence their relevance. In spite of what the French Symbolists did to give a good start to Modern Poetry, the base was still 17th century Metaphysical poetry and this is largely at least criticism's contribution to poetry. Even attention to the French Symbolists, themselves in the debt of Edgar Allan Poe, who wrote two of the seminal essays in criticism, was the work of poet-critics from England and America.

It is again T. S. Eliot that made 18th century poetry respectable. Arnold had said that genuine poetry is composed in the soul, not in the wits, and that the poetry of Dryden and Pope was not poetry at all, but Eliot's "Homage to John Dryden" and Leavis's inordinate concern with the poetry of Pope as exemplifying the positive Augustan standards are both noteworthy. Again, both the critics talked of Johnson's integrity repeatedly and before long Dryden, Pope, and Johnson became part of the living tradition of English poetry in a major way.

The poets of the transition period, especially Gray (in spite of Arnold), suffered a setback at the hands of Eliot, who said that the sentiment of the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" is crude, though the language is refined—an example of the dissociation of sensibility which had set in with Milton. Few of us had realized the damage done by Gray in blunting our sensibilities until Eliot made his passing reference to him. Today even loud-mouthed politicians intent on vote-catching would not glibly echo Gray's "mute Miltons and silent inglorious Cromwells," for someone in the audience is very likely to expose the hypocrisy of the whole thing by retorting "Good Lord, the influence of one Milton has been pernicious enough, why must we ask for trouble by rearing more of them!"

It is the Romantics, most of all, that underwent a radical revaluation at the hands of the New Critics. Hulme, the author of *Speculations* and one of the earliest New Critics, though not called one, fumed (as quoted earlier): "I hate the best of the Romantics, I hate their whining and moaning." But the first shot was fired not so much by the New Critics as by Matthew Arnold, who had said that the Romantics "did not know enough" and dismissed Shelley as an ineffectual angel. The New Critic gave



currency to Arnold's views by repeatedly attacking Romantic poetry. Ransom complained that Shelley hadn't employed concrete images to which the emotions could attach themselves. Robert Penn Warren said in effect that Shelley was the naive hero of his own poem, and so poets like Donne and Pope who showed awareness of themselves went up in his estimation. We are all familiar with Eliot's intemperate attack on Shelley, of whom he said the man was almost a blackguard, and this by a critic distinguished for his urbanity. (He recanted from this position later, though). Even Wordsworth was not to escape the glare of the New Critics. Eliot said of Wordsworth's preoccupation with Nature's beauty, "A poet's business is not to portray beauty or ugliness, but to see beneath both beauty and ugliness the horror, the boredom and the glory of existence." Wordsworth's memorable expression "emotion recollected in tranquillity" was laid bare by Eliot, who remarked it is not the same emotion and it is neither recollection nor tranquillity. Again, Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" had been held to ridicule, for poetry, said Eliot, is not turning loose of emotion, but escape from it, and others thought that no good poet had written so much bad verse as Wordsworth (one half of Wordsworth was a genius, the other half a village idiot, it was said). It is interesting to note that Keats's prestige has remained unaffected by the work of the New Critics. Indeed, it has been enhanced by their analytical approach to his great Odes. One has only to read Leavis' chapter on Keats in *Revaluation* to realize what New Criticism has done to help us understand the nature of Keats's greatness. Which shows that no criticism, not even New Criticism, could do damage to a truly great poet.

Come to the Victorians now. Eliot said Keats and Shelley died, but Tennyson and Browning ruminated. In spite of the fact that Eliot writes a commendatory introduction to a new edition of Tennyson's poems and an essay on *In Memoriam* he has not been able to suppress the rumination—no discerning reader can miss it. For Tennyson failed to grapple with the problems of life. There are vague longings which belong to the Palace of Art (a very significant title for one of his better known poems), and not to actual life, as was insisted upon by New Criticism in its attention to the concrete. It was thus that Arnold the poet

was rejected while his criticism found increasing favour with the New Critics. Because of New Criticism's horror of rhetoric and abstract statement we learnt to have reservations about the much admired Browning whose "God's in his heaven; All's right with the world!" had formerly been so naively cited in scholarly circles as an example of robust optimism. Thanks to Leavis we began to perceive the lack of real pressure behind Browning's words so clearly that we endorsed the critic's wish: oh, had he been less robust! It is interesting how with the New Critic's tool of comparison Robert Penn Warren contrasts the Victorian gardens with Shakespeare's Verona and sighs for that rare self-awareness with which Shakespeare was abundantly blessed.

Despite all the revaluations that resulted from their efforts, it is their valuation of the poetry written by their own contemporaries that should count among the significant achievements of the New Critics. For Eliot and Leavis maintained that one's ability to judge poetry must be demonstrated in telling a good modern poem from a bad one, for a poet is alive in his own age and writes not for posterity but for his own contemporaries and it enjoins upon us to read and understand his relevance to our own generation. After all, we cannot forget that the important New Critics were all poets themselves: Eliot, Ransom, Warren, Blackmur, and Tate. I am not sure that Cleanth Brooks has written any poetry. All the others have, including I. A. Richards and William Empson. And so when they talked of poetry, they exhibited a personal urgency. The point to make is, how well qualified and equipped they were to write about contemporary poetry. Consider how much one poem, *The Waste Land*, demanded of its critic: knowledge of Greek and Latin poetry, Dante, Shakespeare, the Metaphysicals, the Augustans, French Symbolists, Oriental poetry and philosophy, depth psychology, anthropology and modern science. All of which shows how the critic had to develop a wide range of interests as Brooks, Trilling, and Blackmur have demonstrated in their criticism. And others, if they don't have an intimate knowledge, nevertheless show a keen awareness of the variety and levels of response required of them as readers of poetry. Thus New Criticism enormously extended the frontiers of criticism and demanded of

the critic first-rate scholarship, fine sensibility and generally an abiding interest in "man, society and civilization," as Leavis put it. There is a point in mentioning Leavis's name here because he, more than most New Critics, cared for the way the words organized themselves in the work of art. Blackmur is another.

Above all, the New Critic in trying to pay attention to the work of his contemporaries, came to show an extra, even an unprecedented, concern for his own writers—which is the business of responsible criticism. All of them, British and American, made revaluations of British poets and, coming to American poetry as they did after the British experience, they were most likely to avoid the mistakes of the Literary Radicals, who were weighed by nationalist considerations. No wonder therefore that their criticism of American authors has a remarkable balance considering they were rising critics of a relatively younger nation. Such balanced and disinterested concern for their literary scene is conspicuous in the journals they founded, edited, contributed to or associated themselves with, for example, *The Southern Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Sewanee Review*, and *Hudson Review*.

William Elton prepared his glossary of the New Criticism in 1949 and mentioned the names of all the members. According to him, I. A. Richards, the father of New Criticism, showed the necessity for considering the semantic operation of poetry as a unique form of discourse and through practical criticism demonstrated how to read a poetic text. The name-giver is Kenneth Burke. The apostle is Ransom, the prophet is Yvor Winters, Cleanth Brooks the proselytizer in the streets spreading with Robert Penn Warren the gospel of textual analysis. Empson is the dissector of ambiguities and Eliot is the influence whose general rather than specific effect is felt by all the critics. R. P. Blackmur and Allen Tate apply the principles of New Criticism in their own ways.

Names apart, let us recount the achievements of New Criticism: (1) It taught us how to read poetry, that is, to realize that literature has a validity which is expressed in language and that poetry must be read as poetry and not something else. We were rescued, in the words of Carl Bode, from "remarkably recondite researches" on such lumber as "Milton's aunt's inherit-

ance or Wordsworth's letter to the Bishop of Bangkok." (2) It made revaluations of the poetry of the past. (3) It focussed attention on contemporary achievement as reflecting contemporary consciousness. (4) It enlarged the frontiers of criticism by showing the necessity for a knowledge of other disciplines than literature proper. (5) By extension, it turned our attention (as Indians) as nothing else did in the past to our own tradition and our own values and provided us with certain broad tools with which to approach literature—our own as well as English and American.

Has New Criticism any shortcomings? Yes, many. By and large, the New Critics confined themselves to the criticism of poetry—short poems rather than long ones—though a critic like Leavis in England has achieved excellent results by making the new critical approach of close reading in fiction too. His *The Great Tradition* and *D. H. Lawrence, Novelist* are a case in point. In America, Trilling did the same. Brooks and Warren brought in long poems and novels in their *Understanding Poetry* and *Understanding Fiction*. Close reading, however, had a danger of resulting often in the analysis of a given poem in isolation—and ignoring not merely the poet's other poems but of other poetry written during his life-time as well as before and after him, because it considered a work of art as autonomous. Consequently the analysis showed a pedagogy and a preciosity never before known in criticism unless it be in the commentaries on commentaries of certain Indian works like the *Sutras* and the *Gita* in the decadent period of Indian history. Brooks and Blackmur are often guilty of it. Brook's collaborator Wimsatt defends his concern with form as a mode of penetrating into the poem's life. He could well have pointed to the poet's preoccupation with words (as in the *Four Quartets*) as the analogue of the saint's wrestling with the problems of life, each working out his salvation in his own way. Besides, Brooks writes on Milton, Gray, and Tennyson as if nothing has happened to their reputations in the 20th century. He praises the allusive quality of Gray's *Elegy* and doesn't care to examine what the allusions are doing and whether the allusive quality of the *Elegy* is the same as that of *The Waste Land*. That is, Brooks hardly makes any value judgments; he is content to offer mere explica-

tions. Consider Blackmur's essay "Examples of Wallace Stevens," where the critic takes a few lines of Stevens' poetry, makes "a linguistic, procedural, strategic approach." But the poem as a whole doesn't come alive to the reader. This is offset by his better essays—on Yeats, on Eliot, and on Marianne Moore.

I. A. Richards, who talked so warmly of "organization of impulses" and "value judgements" in his seminal work *Principles of Literary Criticism*, did not dare to commit himself on any poem in his *Practical Criticism* and the title thus remains a misnomer. Also, he today repudiates all that he said earlier and considers his epoch-making work *Principles of Literary Criticism* simply "juvenile" and of course he wouldn't "like to be judged by it."<sup>5</sup> Allen Tate, less known than I. A. Richards, did a better job in applied criticism. For human beings, said Tate, must do something more than respond, though we don't know what he meant by it. He improved on Richard's communication theory by suggesting communion in place of communication and showed a genuine concern with the deep illness of the modern mind when he recommended that literature and literary criticism must heal the tissues of the spirit. But it is T. S. Eliot who, if one may say so, really undid his earlier work in criticism. From his "After Strange Gods" days, while his integrity as a poet has remained the same, he has, in Leavis's words, suffered loss of purity of motivation and interest in criticism. One need only refer to his essays on "Religion and Literature," *Hamlet*, and that most scandalous recantation, his second essay on Milton, and the not so scandalous revision of his former strictures on Shelley.

But the worst is yet to come. Yvor Winters struck many a strange, discordant note. To him Robert Bridges was the greatest poet. And then come Sturge Moore and (more shocking) Mrs. Daryush (daughter of Robert Bridges?), nowhere mentioned in discussions of modern poetry except in critics' attacks on Winters. W. B. Yeats was in his estimation a poet of melodramatic emotionalism. He held William Carlos Williams superior to T. S. Eliot, who was only a derivative poet. He predicts

<sup>5</sup> I have reproduced his words from a conversation I had with him in Mysore in 1954.

that 2000 A.D. will establish William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens as the two greatest poets of the century and considers "Sunday Morning" as the greatest poem of the age.

It is true New Criticism has its excesses and perversities. During the past few years the New Critics have met with opposition precisely because of these oddities and excesses, from a variety of sources. First came the Chicago critics like R. S. Crane, whose Aristotelian approach René Wellek dismissed as "an ultra academic exercise destined to wither on the vine." Wimsatt ridiculed them by comparing their stand to a blue-print for an automobile without ever having any thought of producing one. Carl Bode takes a serious view of the other enemies of New Criticism when he says of the Beats: "Crude and boisterous, they have in passing pushed the New Critics from the centre of the stage, and this with antics of a most ungentlemanly sort. They have simply outdone—and shouted down—the New Critics." Bode defended Allen Tate against one of the leading Beats when he asked: "How could a gentleman compete with a clod?" But all detractions made it is still the most valuable of all kinds of criticism in so far as it won attention to the work of art in terms of words on the printed page—Leavis's "discussible particularities." It is most unlikely to lose its validity if it is looked upon as *another* important mode of exploration of the work of art added to our critical heritage, thus validating multiplicity of approaches to art. But its value as probably the best mode of achieving completeness of response comes out beyond a doubt in comparison with the preceding modes of judging a work of art.

An Indian critic following the course of Anglo-American criticism from Matthew Arnold to the newest critic on either side of the Atlantic may, with some hesitation, feel called upon to append a note to this assessment especially as so eminent a critic of comparative literature as René Wellek with his enviable combination of European background and American involvement has pronounced that the New Criticism has exhausted itself and the time has come for change. Unfortunately Professor Wellek does not care to tell us on what lines the change may come except to say that criticism is in need of "the international perspective." It is amazing that in spite of Arnold's commenda-

tion of "the Indian virtue of detachment" and "knowledge of Eastern antiquity" in a critic of literature there has not been any widespread vigorous following of the Indian approach to works of art. The New Critics have exemplified in varying degrees "the Indian virtue of detachment" but as for knowledge of Eastern antiquity, with the rare exception of T. S. Eliot, who himself confesses to considerable Indian influence on his sensibility, no New Critic of any standing has shown any real awareness of the Indian critical tradition.

Perhaps this will provide the guide-line for the future of criticism and, beyond any doubt, the "international perspective" which Professor Wellek asks for. The critic who knew that nothing less than our sense of the whole history and destiny of man was involved in any judgment of a work of art—all he knew of the East was some scrap of information which must have come to him casually from Chinese sources and found its way as epigram or quotation in his books. As for knowledge of India, he did not seem to have any until he came to India and his brief visit to this country a dozen years ago was obviously enough to give him confidence to speak to his admiring Indian audiences of Shelley's "West Wind" and Keats's "Grecian Urn" as having the incantatory effect of Vedic hymns.

Now Sri Aurobindo in his undeservedly neglected critical work *Future Poetry* speaks of *mantric* poetry as the future poetry of the world. Alone among modern poets T. S. Eliot has in his "Ash Wednesday" and *Four Quartets* shown how great poetry "aspires to the condition of music." But then Eliot was deeply involved in the Upanishads and mazes of Patanjali in the original Sanskrit. It is surprising that Western indifference born largely of imperial preference, to put it mildly, should have smothered all intellectual curiosity in this respect. Did Ananda Coomaraswamy, Aurobindo Ghose, and Hiriyanna write in vain so far as the Western critics were concerned? Such was his devotion to the West, that the Indian critic showed no more interest in them than his Western counterpart. These three, the first in art criticism and the rest in literature and art, tried to recover the lost Indian tradition of judging literature by the standard of *rasa*, *dhwani*, and *vakrokti*, inadequately translated as sentiment, suggestion, and ambiguity, respectively—each form-

ing a major approach and constituting an important school in Indian literary criticism, fully developed and virtually forgotten by the end of the first millennium after Christ. The magnificent myth-making power of the Indians, their view of poetry as having its genesis in rich creative suffering (*soka* transmuted into *sloka*); poetry as functional (social centrality); as meditation (*dhyana*) and prayer (*mantra*); involving all levels from the *pandita* (scholar) to the *alpabuddhi jana* (common man); and response to poetry as involving the total being (*akhanda charvana*, a total recall of the whole being)—all make the Indian view of poetry a valid instrument to be used with profit by literary critics of the future. And what is of immediate value to the Western critic is the Indian view of the *Sahrdaya*, the critic as the ideal reader, an equal collaborator with the author of the work. Unfortunately there was a snag in the Indian approach: there was no sustained elucidation of the whole work of art anywhere, though scenes from the classical plays, situations, characters and their utterances in the epics have been admirably commented upon by discerning critics. But this is perhaps due to the fact that the pursuit of art and literature in its sophisticated form was the business of the cultured class, and culture nourished a tiny minority among whose members there must have been tacit assumptions which obviated the need to explicate at length—a blessing in a society where the oral tradition reigned supreme in the intellectual sphere. After all, explication is a product of democracy and the immense verbiage that goes with it a phenomenon of our age of mass communication.

But what is important is that, as René Wellek so wisely points out, the basic aesthetics must have a sure philosophical foundation. It is presumed that Wellek does not mean by it philosophy, which is a different matter altogether. If by philosophic foundation is meant the way of life of a people—for art is the resultant of the ferment of felt experience of a people—the critic of art, it is only fair to expect, must seek to know how the ferment is caused in life and actualized in art. For only then can he make art support the spiritual atmosphere of a people.

The New Critic has his tools all right in his Irony, Paradox, Tension, Ambiguity. Objective Correlative, Double Agent, Con-



crete Universal, and so forth. But these are only master metaphors generally used in understanding the poetic craft, "decisive figures" in getting at the "form" of the poem but do not necessarily involve a profound engagement with life at its deepest except in a critic like T. S. Eliot, that is, in his theoretical enunciations. The problem is how to realise in practice what even Eliot has not always succeeded in achieving in his criticism. It is here that "knowledge of Indian antiquity" needs to become a pervasive force in literary criticism. But it involves much more than knowledge, a profound acquaintance with it as a way of life which one can hardly set forth in an undertaking like the present or, for that matter, anywhere, for at best it can only be seen in specific manifestations. Meanwhile, for a concrete direction, one would visualise a combination of the kind of equipment of a T. S. Eliot and the intelligence and concern of an F. R. Leavis so evident in his critical performance. The critic of the future needs the combined wisdom of both.

## THE CHICAGO CRITICS : AN INTRODUCTION

S. NAGARAJAN

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THE OBJECTS of this paper are to set forth briefly some of the principal ideas of a group of American critics who are not perhaps as well known with us here in India as, for instance, those whom we call, conveniently if not very discriminatingly, the New Critics. There are at least two reasons, both fairly obvious, for this comparative lack of knowledge. The work of the Chicago Critics is still fairly recent. It is still largely theoretical and has begun to influence the writing of text-books only in the last four or five years. Of its influence on creative literature, I must confess I know very little; and it is through this latter kind of influence that a critical movement gains recognition. Secondly, the style of the Chicago Critics is, on the whole, very involved and does not make for easy or smooth reading. Nevertheless what these critics have to say is of fundamental importance, and their actual literary criticism is already considerable. A dogged attempt to understand their ideas and state some of them in a popular form is worthwhile.

Who are the Chicago Critics? The name was originally applied to a group of scholars of the University of Chicago who published a large critical anthology entitled *Critics and Criticism : Ancient and Modern* in 1952. The description is now extended to cover some of the pupils and sympathisers of these scholars. The first section of *Critics and Criticism* (abbreviated here as CC) is devoted to the rigorous scrutiny of the theory and prac-

tice of influential contemporary critics such as I. A. Richards, William Empson and Cleanth Brooks. In the second section there are historical essays on certain major critical concepts (ex. "imitation") and on leading critics of the past. The third section contains some general essays on the philosophical bases of art and criticism, on poetic theory and symbolism as well as a couple of studies of individual literary works. In 1953 Professor Ronald Crane, the leader of this group, published his *Alexander Lectures* delivered at Toronto in 1952-1953 under the title of *The Language of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* (abbreviated here as *LCSP*). These two books set out the general theoretical position of the Chicago Critics. Since then there has been plenty of other writing by the Chicago Critics. Notable among these works are: *The Rhetoric of Fiction* by Wayne Booth; *Tragedy and the Theory of Drama* by Elder Olson; and a two-volumed *History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* by Bernard Weinberg. The present account of these critics is compiled in the main from Professor Crane's *Alexander Lectures* supplemented occasionally from *Critics and Criticism*.

Criticism today has become a Tower of Babel. On all sides we are assailed by a hundred voices, shrieking, scolding, mocking or merely chattering. What all these voices seem to have in common is mutual intolerance and incomprehension. Why is this so? There is, to begin with, the human nature of the critics. Their temperaments differ—and differ so much that they cannot even distinguish their differences. Then there is an inherent difficulty in the very nature of the subject which critics discuss. Thus one critic talks of *Macbeth*, and he is sharply taken up by another who, it transpires too late, is really interested in Shakespearean tragedy in general. What purports to be a dialogue is in fact a pair of parallel monologues meeting in infinite incomprehension and abuse. There is also, says Professor Crane, a third reason why critics differ, and this is perhaps the most important of all. Criticism is not a univocal language, but is composed of utterly different languages. Some critical languages permit only certain critical questions to be raised; others, certain other questions only, and so on. Worse still; if we accept a particular critical language we can see only those aspects of the poem for which our critical language possesses

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the terms of description and analysis. Other aspects of the poem cannot even be perceived. Thus a Shakespeare tragedy, according to L. C. Knights, is a poem, and so it is, if we accept Knights' definition of a poem. For A. C. Bradley, Knights' former *bete noire*, it is the representation of the tragic aspect of life, and so it is, if we think of drama as Bradley did. On their own premises, both Knights and Bradley are justified. Their critical languages happen to differ, and there really need be no quarrel between them. They are simply talking about different objects.

Does this critical pluralism justify either fatalism or relativism? Not at all, assures Professor Crane. One can, and must in fact, discriminate among the various critical languages. No doubt a certain amount of faith is necessary to begin with, the faith that the particular critical language that one is backing will reach the poem which is our winning-post, but this faith need not be an indiscreet one. We need not give up our standards of reasoning, or common sense, or the making of hypotheses. We need not lower our requirements of proof and verification, or abandon our honest emotional responses in deference to the totalitarian dogmas of a critical language. We can legitimately ask of a critical language whether it is well-stocked with terms and concepts to take care of as many aspects of poetry as any decent, respectable critical language should be capable of. We may ask of it, further, whether it can distinguish among kinds of poetry also without vulgarly confusing a didactic poem with a mimetic poem. We may press our interrogation to find out whether the critical language in question is prepared to be friends with biography and history, *not* letting bygones be bygones. We may refuse to bestow our faith on a critical language that cannot rise to these requirements. One may ask: Cannot these requirements be satisfied by a combination of critical languages? Professor Crane's firm answer is: No. It won't do at all to pick and choose the good patches of each critical language to make a crazy quilt to lay the poem on. The virtues of each language are peculiar to it and cannot be combined with others without nullifying them; if we try to combine the virtues of water with the virtues of milk we shall obtain a liquid which has the virtues of neither, a fact which Indian milk-vendors fail to appreciate. We must have several acceptable

critical languages at our command, and we must take care not to commit our allegiance feudally to any one of them.

It must be admitted that there is something attractive about this doctrine of critical pluralism. It holds out the enticing promise of peace and co-operation on the campus, two qualities notoriously lacking in campus-life. Some, it is true, have pointed out that these virtues have not distinguished some of the critical essays in *Critics and Criticism*, but it must be remembered that a revolutionary regime fighting for its place in the sun as the apostle of a new gospel is apt to be somewhat bellicose before settling down into a normal diplomatic life in sedate coat-tails. And in truth, in some of the later writings of the Chicago Critics, the earlier headiness has worn off. But there are other doubts that are somewhat more difficult to answer.

In support of his thesis that critical languages limit one's perceptions, Professor Crane quotes the opinion of Edward Sapir that language is an instrument of discovery in the sense that its forms pre-determine for us certain modes of observation and interpretation (*LCSP*, 11; for the opinion of Sapir, see his article on Language in the *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. 9). Without going into the general validity of Sapir's contention—I understand that not all linguists would accept it today quite in that uncompromising form—it is still open to doubt whether Professor Crane has made a fair use of Sapir. After all, Sapir was talking about languages as exemplified by, say, Hopi or French. In his book on *Language*, Sapir wrote that aborigines who had never previously seen a horse were compelled to invent or borrow a word for the animal when they saw it for the first time (Harvest edition, p. 219). The experience occurred first, and the term was found for it. Surely, it does not require any religious charity to concede that critics may not be less empirically gifted than aborigines! The honest critic, like the honest aborigine, experiences the poem, his horse, and then endeavours to describe or analyse his experience as best as he can. Professor Crane has said that one of the factors determining the character of a piece of critical writing is the critic himself: a man endowed with a certain set of interests, a certain intellectual capacity, a certain range of reading and information, and a certain degree of taste and sensibility; to

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which we may add, lest it be taken too much for granted, a certain amount of the varied experience of life. If Professor Crane had pondered over this indeed obvious factor of influence instead of making a distant bow in its direction, he would have better appreciated, I think, the fact that such a creature is protected by these very qualities from succumbing to the blandishments of a critical language. The safeguard that Professor Crane proposes is that we should do our theorizing in a spirit of philosophic comparison between the principles that we ourselves prefer and the principles of others. Those of us who are fortunate enough to possess the intellectual detachment, partly a gift of the good fairies and partly a cultivated virtue, necessary for this task of comparison will rarely be hoodwinked in the manner that Professor Crane fears. Compare, for instance, the following statements of two Shakespeare critics of their aims and methods :

1. It is also necessary to a true conception of the whole, to compare, to analyse, to dissect. . . In this process of comparison and analysis, it is not requisite, it is on the contrary ruinous, to set imagination aside and to substitute some supposed "cold reason"; and it is only want of practice that makes the concurrent use of analysis and of poetic perception difficult or irksome. And in the second place these dissecting processes, though they are also imaginative, are still, and are meant to be, nothing but means to an end. When they have finished their work (it can only be finished for the time) they give place to the end which is that same imaginative reading or re-creation of the drama from which they set out, but a reading now enriched by the products of analysis, and therefore, far more adequate and enjoyable.

2. Analysis . . . is the process by which we seek to attain a complete reading of the poem—a reading which approaches as nearly as possible to the perfect reading. Analysis is not a dissection of something that is already and passively there. What we call analysis is of course a constructive or creative process. It is a more deliberate following through of that process of creation in response to the poet's words which reading is. It is a recreation in which, by a considering atten-

tiveness we ensure a more than ordinary faithfulness and completeness.

These two critics, Professor Crane would place in two different critical languages, and yet how similar their views are. One, of course, is Bradley himself (Preface to *Shakespearean Tragedy*), and the second is F. R. Leavis (*Scrutiny*, IX, 309). Both seem to agree that the first job of the critic is to experience the literary work completely without preconceptions drawn from a critical language. The critical language becomes relevant after and not before the experience of the poem has been realized. It is because Bradley realized the Shakespearean experience so faithfully that his interpretations of Shakespearean characters have endured. And in Leavis himself one can find plenty of examples of character-study. Differences of course arise and persist among critics, responsible critics, because of the stubbornly differential nature of literary experience. The safeguard against critical blindness does not consist in equipping oneself with several pairs of spectacles, but in sharpening one's natural vision with careful nurture. We must encourage, says Professor Crane, a multiplicity of critical languages. As part of a general plea for catholicity and tolerance, the exhortation is most unexceptionable. But more attractive is the old Arnoldian exhortation for the freeplay of the uncommitted mind which Professor Lionel Trilling rightly revived in the recent debate on "the two cultures."

The Chicago Critics are often described as Neo-Aristotelians. Professor Crane informs us that the name was first bestowed on them by their friend, Mr. Kenneth Burke, and though they have never adopted it themselves, it does point, he concedes, to one obvious direction of their activities. These critics claim that Aristotle was the first and last critic to grasp the fact that what the poet did *distinctively as a poet* was not to express himself or his age, or to resolve psychological or moral difficulties, or to communicate a vision of the world, or to provide entertainment, or to use words in such-and-such ways and so on—though all these might be involved in what he did—but rather by means of his art to build materials of language and experience into wholes of various kinds to which, as we ex-

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perienced them, we tended to attribute final rather than merely instrumental value (Introduction to *CC*, 13; Crane's italics). Having grasped this fact Aristotle went on to devise an appropriate and workable method of inquiring into the structure of such wholes. He set up analytic devices that would permit us to discriminate the various species of wholes that poets have made; to determine the number, character and ordering of their functional parts; and to define the often quite different conditions of success or failure implied by the nature of each. Such analytic devices are not available, alleges Professor Crane, in any of the current modes of criticism; they are especially absent in the New Criticism. The Chicago Critics have therefore turned to the study of Aristotle, but, claims Professor Crane, in a pragmatic and non-exclusive spirit. (For their understanding of Aristotle they are indebted to Professor Richard Mckeon, who contributes 225 pages out of 640 in *CC*.)

What are the features of the Aristotelian method that make it a very necessary supplement to current critical practice? Aristotle's method is strictly *a posteriori*; that is, from given poems he argues back to their four-fold causes, the formal, the material, the efficient and the final. He looks upon a poem as a concrete, artificial whole that uses a medium of words to body forth interesting and moving patterns of human experience for the sake of the specific beauty of the imitation. A "concrete whole" is a thing of which we can give an adequate account only when we specify both the matter or elements of which it is composed and the form or principle of structure by reason of which the matter has the character of a definite existing thing; form and matter are not separable in any real sense though we may talk about them separately in analytical exposition. Of concrete wholes, there are two kinds: natural and artificial. In the natural, to which different kinds of poems and their parts may belong, the form is in the nature of the thing itself. In the artificial the form is in the mind of the human being who creates the whole; "from art proceed the things of which the form is in the soul of the artist" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, vii, 7, quoted *LCSP*, 44). The productive sciences are concerned with the making of concrete artificial things. Poetics is one of the productive sciences. In such a science we reason back from a plan to the necessary or desirable conditions of its fulfilment.



We start with the conception of the house we want and reason back to what we need to build it with, and what we must or must not do in building it. So it is with poems. From the end to be achieved we go back to the means that are necessary. If a tragedy is to be composed that will exert its full and characteristic effect, it must have a plot of a certain kind, thought and diction of a certain kind, etc. In addition to certain essential general conditions for the making of poems, there are certain other conditions that are specific to different poetic forms or species. Finally, poetics is also concerned with the investigation of the best possible state, consistent with their specific natures, to which different kinds of poems and their parts may be brought. In his *Poetics* Aristotle is concerned with the making, not indeed of all poems, but only of those which happen in the first place to be imitations, and even among such imitations, especially of those that are tragedies. The questions that Aristotle asks are: Is this poem an imitation? What is the manner of its imitation? What is the medium of its imitation? Aristotle's way with poetry is not only *a posteriori* but differential also. In his system we can distinguish among poems, not indeed on the basis of effects as the eighteenth-century critic used to, misled by the rhetorical tradition of Horace, but on the basis of the questions asked above. The method is perfectly capable of dealing with the varieties of poems which have emerged since Aristotle's day. We can adapt it to distinguish, for instance, the characterization appropriate to a play from that of a novel; the style appropriate to an epic from that of a lyric.

Most critical languages today are monistic, on the contrary. They seek the "poetry" of a poem in what is but one aspect of its making, language, for example, claiming that the essential, distinguishing quality of poetry resides in ambiguity or irony or paradox. For Aristotle, on the contrary, language is the differential between linguistic and non-linguistic imitations. It is not the genus itself, as it is for critics like Cleanth Brooks or John Crowe Ransom. In the New Criticism the differences between poetry and non-poetry tend to be merely of degree and not of kind. Further, in the language of New Criticism there is no provision for envisaging the poem as a whole. On the contrary, the New Critics discover "the form" of the poem in the means, the

language, and "the matter" of the poem then becomes a function of the bias or interest—language or anthropology, for instance—of the particular critic. "This dichotomy of 'matter' and 'form' collapsing and reversing the qualitative parts of Aristotelian poetics is due in turn to definitions of poetry which are not causal but analogical in character." (Elder Olson, *Modern Philology*, XL, 278). Such non-causal definitions cannot lead except accidentally to the internal analysis of a given species. Instead of such internal analysis the New Criticism provides a mere correlation between an internal principle (style) and an external principle (subject-matter or content). (See *LCSP*, 99.) It is tacitly assumed by the New Critics that the structure of poetry is semantic purely and therefore all poems, *The Odyssey* as well as *The Waste Land*, have the same structure. Which is obviously untrue. A didactic poem like *The Divine Comedy* is a very different kind of poem from an imitative one, such as an epic, a tragedy or a comedy. The didactic poem is geared to a thesis or a doctrine; the needs of enforcing the doctrine rule what it should be as a whole. The imitative poem is geared on the contrary to the plot. In a didactic poem the characters represent the subjects and the incidents represent the predicates of the doctrinal proposition sought to be enforced. The characters of an imitative poem are present because an action, if it is to effect emotion, must be morally determinate, and hence must involve agents and patients of a determinate moral cast, or because they are convenient to the effective representation of that action. The language of a didactic poem must always be many-meaninged, or "polysemous" as Dante called it. The language of an imitative poem is ambiguous only when plot, character, thought, or the exigencies of of representation demand that it be so. (See Olson, *CC*, Phoenix edition, p. 46). To say as Cleanth Brooks does that the structure of poetry at its best is *always* a structure of paradox because paradox is of the very nature of poetic language is patently false. The language of modern criticism represented by I. A. Richards and his followers has terms only for the materials of language (and subject-matter, if we wish to include those who judge poetry by its content) which poets use in *some* poems. It cannot cope with the structure of the poem

as a concrete artistic whole.

How did this critical myopia come about? Professor Crane's explanation is that the followers of I. A. Richards have been misled by the fact that language is common to all discourse, including scientific discourse. In an age when the prestige of science is sickeningly high, one feels morally obliged, as it were, to distinguish the language of poetry in some way that will protect its existence and status from supersession at the hands of science. One way of doing so is to say that in science each word has one sense only; whereas in poetry "most words are ambiguous as regards their plain sense. We can take them as we please in a variety of senses . . . . Poetry is just the reverse of science." (I. A. Richards, *Science and Poetry*, reprinted in Schorer, Miles, Mackenzie, *Criticism*, N. Y., 1948, p. 510.) The knowledge that poetry gives is unique, it organizes our impulses, and the poem that organizes the most number of heterogeneous, even opposed, impulses is better than the one that organizes only a few or only those that are homogeneous. The superior poem caters for a greater number and variety of our interests.

This is the main charge that the Chicago Critics make against the New Critics: their language is incapable of treating the poem as a concrete artistic whole of a particular type or kind of which the special character is determined by its own internal principles of construction. The problem of poetic structure is reduced to an assured simplicity. The unity of a poem is sought in the unity of signification or theme, and the theme is discovered fairly easily by examining all the parts of a poem in their inter-relations or inter-reactions with one another. Poetry becomes a quality of the language.

Are we then to give up the New Criticism altogether? No, says Professor Crane, in reprieve. "There is no critical language that cannot be made to yield valuable observations and insights when it is applied, with skill and discretion, to individual works, and the fruitfulness within its limits, of this semantic language has been exemplified on many occasions." (*LCSP*, 108.) But it needs to be supplemented with a critical language which asks what the primary intuition of form was for the poet which enables him to synthesise his materials into an ordered whole. We need

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a language . . . in which we can talk about the internal necessities and possibilities in poems and the problems these posed for their poets rather than merely about the necessities and problems defined for us by our special choice of dialectical premises; in which we can develop terms for distinguishing the formal causes of poems from their material constituents and technical mechanisms; and in which we finally can achieve a precision of differentiation in speaking of the structure of different poems which is not glaringly incommensurate with the formal inventiveness of poets. (*LCSP*, 149.)

The nearest approach to such a language is that of Aristotle.

We may defer for the moment the necessity of the prescription and look at the diagnosis of the disease which the New Critics are alleged to suffer from. We have all of us had our moments—or days—of disagreement, even irritation, with this or that interpretation of a poem put up by Empson or Cleanth Brooks, but on the whole, we have been inclined to dismiss their mal-interpretations as temporary lapses of the critic's sense of relevance or history, and have been inclined to accept their work as useful and profitable in the main. Now for the first time a formidable attack is launched on the very principles on which the New Critics work; in the light of New Chicago Criticism, earlier attempts to criticise them, seem amateurish and mere prolegomena. One instantly feels grateful and respectful. However, we must ask: How far is this criticism justified? In *Critics and Criticism*, Professor Crane has singled out the work of Cleanth Brooks for representative examination, and in the same representative spirit, we may examine whether the charge of methodological confusion is justified.

When it first appeared in *Modern Philology* (May, 1948), Professor Crane's essay was aggressively entitled, "Cleanth Brooks, or The Bankruptcy of Critical Monism." In reprinting it in *Critics and Criticism*, Professor Crane was more considerate, and re-christened it as "The Critical Monism of Cleanth Brooks." The essay examines for the most part Brooks's *The Well-Wrought Urn*. What upset Professor Crane when he read Cleanth Brooks was not Brooks's discovery—he was welcome to it—that irony was present in all poems, but the fact that

there did not seem to be for Brooks any other trait of poetry at all; irony or paradox *was* poetry, and that was all there was to the matter. This was critical monism, and all the New Critics who were inspired by Richards were deeply infected with it. Brooks stated in his book that one of the important perceptions of our time was the fact that the the parts of a poem had an organic relation with each other; the poetry of a poem inhered in the structure of the poem as a whole. It was not a logical structure, however, which could be put into a prose paraphrase. It was a structure of "meanings, evaluations and interpretations" and the principle of unity which informed it was "one of balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes and meanings." The principle united like with unlike in a positive way; and the unity achieved represented a genuine harmony, not a mere residue. It was structure of this kind that induced Brooks to use terms like irony and paradox. He admitted that these were not perhaps very satisfactory terms, but whatever terms one elected to use, they would have to be such as would do justice to the special kind of structure of poems so diverse on other counts as "The Rape of the Lock" and Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears."

Professor Crane rightly pointed out that the latter part of Brooks's description of poetic structure as arising from a principle of unity which balanced and harmonized connotations, attitudes and meanings was indebted to Coleridge's well-known definition of the imagination in the fourteenth chapter of the *Biographia Literaria*. But Brooks had effected a far-reaching change of application in taking it over. He had turned Coleridge's definition of the imagination into a definition of a poem. Coleridge had made a clear distinction between poetry and poem. *Poetry* was the expression of the imagination and could be found outside a poem also, in Plato as well as Jeremy Taylor. No poem of any length, however, could be or ought to be all poetry. On the other hand, *a poem* was "that species of composition which was opposed to works of science by proposing for its immediate object, pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it was discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole as was compatible with distinct gratification from each component part." Brooks restricted to poems what Coleridge had proposed

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as a universal operation of the human mind, to be found outside poems also. As a result of this restriction the notion of pleasure as the differentiating end of poetry disappeared. Another loss was the useful distinction between manner and matter, form and substance, language and thought. Everything now resolved itself into structure. The very notion of poetry was changed from a criterion of value to the differential of poems. Coleridge could distinguish among poems as those possessing poetry and those without it. But for Brooks, it is neck or nothing. Further, Brooks is forced to operate his poetic theory without reference to the poet at all since the imagination is now seen in the structure of the poem itself. But still some enabling cause of poetic structure has to be found, and it is putatively discovered in the language of the poem. Brooks is a materialistic monist, and his concepts are purely and narrowly grammatical in origin. "They designate the mutual qualification—and especially one mode of it—that inevitably occurs when the meanings of individual words or sentences or passages are not fixed by prior definition, but are determined immediately, in the discourse itself, by the 'contexts' in which they stand." (CC, 94.)

The confusion of thought in Brooks extended further. Brooks says that the use of irony and paradox is thrust on the poet by the very nature of the language he is using, and that the poet's task is to unify experience. This means that it is not the principle of unity derived from the nature of the experience or object represented in the poem which determines the poetical structure; rather, it is the presence in poems of poetical structure—i.e., ironical opposition and resolution—that determines, and is the sign of, the unification of experience. The question, "How is the structure of a poem determined?" is never really faced. Or rather, we are referred in answer to the language of the poem.

So runs the list of charges.

In the first place, it cannot be denied that Brooks has transferred Coleridge's definition of poetry to poems. (Professor Crane implies that the transfer has occurred either unwittingly or through careless reading of Coleridge.) Brooks does mean that poems in which the Coleridgean imagination is not found are

not *good* poems, for good poems present unified experience. It is difficult to understand therefore why Professor Crane should complain that Brooks is no longer using poetry as a criterion of value, but merely as the differential of poems. Brooks says explicitly: "The poem, if it is to be a true poem, is a simulacrum of reality—in this sense, at least it is an 'imitation'—by *being* an experience rather than any mere statement about experience or any mere abstraction from experience." (*The Well-Wrought Urn*, Harvest edition, p. 213.) The second objection of Professor Crane is that Brooks nowhere hints that pleasure is the end of poetry. It is in considering why this omission occurs in Brooks that we perhaps find a clue to why he has transferred Coleridge's definition of poetry to poems, good poems, that is. None can, or does deny that poems give pleasure. But it is doubtful if much is gained by defining pleasure as the immediate end of poetry. Professor Elder Olson, a Chicago Critic himself, says in one of the essays in *Critics and Criticism* that the end of mimetic poetry is to effect beauty which results in pleasure (CC, 588). Professor Crane also admits that it is one thing to say that the function of poetry is to produce pleasure, and another altogether to say that pleasure results from it (CC, 18). The problem is to define the peculiar quality of poetic pleasure, and to distinguish among kinds of poetic pleasure. Coleridge attempted the task when he said that the pleasure arising from the parts should be compatible with the greatest sum of pleasure in the whole. But the basic difficulty persists. Pleasure is a stubbornly subjective experience, and to conduct a critical discourse in terms of one's subjective experiences will lead us either to critical relativism or to irrelevant autobiography. Secondly, as the aesthetician Eliseo Vivas questions, is it fair to maintain that the emotions produced by *King Lear* are the same as those produced by *Macbeth*? (*The Artistic Transaction*, Ohio State University Press, 1963, p. 253.) Brooks' silence on the pleasure-part of Coleridge's theory may not be construed uncharitably to mean that he is a latter-day puritan.

But of course the gravamen of the charge is that Brooks has reduced the structure of poetry to a quality of language—paradox or irony. Let us look at the quotation that Professor Crane makes from Brooks to substantiate this charge. "The

structure obviously is everywhere conditioned by the nature of the material which goes into the poem. The nature of the material sets the problem to be solved, and the solution is the ordering of the material." On this Professor Crane's introductory comment is that Brooks, having failed to get the structure of the poem from anything else, was getting it out of the linguistic elements. What has happened in Professor Crane's interpretation is clear enough. He is thinking, good Aristotelian, of material in the sense of language, while Brooks is thinking of something else, as the larger context of the quotation makes it clear. After stating that nothing, subject-matter, or diction, or imagery, was intrinsically poetic or non-poetic, Brooks admits that nevertheless all materials do not have the same potentialities. The nature of the material determines the structure. This material may be described as "connotations, attitudes and meanings." The principle of unity consists in balancing and harmonizing them. When they are so balanced and harmonized in a poem, the poem achieves a structure of meanings, evaluations and interpretations. This structure is not to be identified with language, says Brooks very clearly. It is an internal order.

How is ironical or paradoxical language related to the structure of the poem? The principle of unity which informs the poetic structure is one of balancing connotations, attitudes and meanings, and irony is the most general term, it seems to Brooks, that we have for the kind of qualification which the various elements receive from one another, the most general term that we have for the recognition and reconciliation of the incongruities or incompatibles of experience. The poet who would write a good poem must dramatically present diverse experiences in his poem and resolve their ambiguities and paradoxes into a new pattern. If he fails to do so, the ambiguity or irony remains purely on a linguistic level, superficially exciting or mystifying.

It is not altogether correct to say, therefore, that Brooks regards poetic structure as inhering purely in language, or that he identifies "poetry" with irony, with verbal structure. In a "true" poem "what the poem says" is "what the poem is." The principle of the unification of experience determines the entire structure of the poem. Brooks does not say where the principle comes from. Coleridge argued that it came from the imagina-



tion, i.e., from the poet. If Brooks does not say this explicitly, I think, it is because he does not wish to retreat from the poem, which is after all the evidence before us of the imagination, into the psychology of the poet. Of course there is a poet and there is such a "thing" as a poet's mind. A poem, we have been reminded, comes out of a head, and not out of a hat. But Brooks wanted to talk about poems, neither about hats nor about heads. I am not sure that Mr. Eliot illuminated our understanding of the poetic process very much when he attempted in one of his early essays to reveal how the minds of poets functioned. All that one reader I know of got out of that account was a bit of news about the odd behaviour of platinum when it was in certain company.

Professor Crane also complains that Brooks does not distinguish among kinds of poems. He distinguishes simply on the basis of complexity of attitude alone, the unification of experience that has taken place (*The Well-Wrought Urn*, 224). Brooks' distinction is a judgment of value, and Professor Crane's a judgment not involving value. That is, even if Professor Crane's mode is accepted, there will be room for Brooks' way; the one is not a substitute for the other. After we have distinguished between imitative poems and didactic poems, we may still want to explain why we prefer, shall we say, imitative poems to didactic ones, or one imitative poem to another. Value is an essential feature of Brooks' critical thinking.

Another dissatisfaction of Professor Crane with the New Critics as represented by Brooks is that Brooks' conception of the structure of a poem would turn Plato's *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* into poems. Brooks' answer, I suppose, would be to repeat the arguments that he refers to in *The Well-Wrought Urn* from William Urban (pp. 259-265), and submit that the language of poetry is representational or symbolic, whereas the language of Plato is referential. Plato's work invites us to go out of the book and test the truth of what it says, whereas a poem does not; the poem is a self-sufficient dramatic structure. That, of course, is not the whole of the story of the intricate and complex relation of poetry to life, but that, I believe, would be Brooks' answer in essence.

I have, somewhat laboriously in the manner of a medieval

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controversialist, gone through "Crane on Brooks," for I wish to suggest that Professor Crane has misunderstood Brooks. Professor Crane has spoken of the plurality of critical languages. But another way of talking about criticism is also possible and perhaps preferable. One can think of criticism as a great river with many tributaries to it, and every good critic swims in the *Sangam* at Allahabad, content to accept all the rivers without seeking to distinguish the waters of Ganga from the waters of Yamuna. Brooks is indebted to Coleridge; so is Professor Crane. And in Coleridge there is a great deal of Aristotle. Thus Professor Crane speaks of "the actual final cause of a poem" by which he means "simply a cause without the assumption of which as somehow effective in the writing, the observable characteristics of the parts, their presence in the poem, their arrangement and proportioning and their inter-connections cannot be adequately understood." (*LCSP*, 166.) How is this conception related to Coleridge's principle of "organic form" which he found illustrated in the plays of Shakespeare? Does it come from Aristotle's "dynamic"? Is it altogether different from Brooks' principle of unity which informs the entire structure of the poem? These are nice inquiries for a genealogist of critical ideas, though it is easy to exaggerate their practical importance to the critic examining a poem before him.

The second part of the manifesto of the Chicago Critics is the attempt to restore the pristine Aristotle who has been misunderstood for centuries. The attempt is wholly laudable in so far as it is a plea for inductive criticism. Literary criticism must necessarily start its job with actual poems, and whenever the New Critics have shown themselves more interested in their own speculations set off by the poem than in the poem itself, their wiser readers have betaken themselves elsewhere for critical help. Likewise the plea that we must treat the poem as a concrete whole will also be readily accepted though not the implication that we have been steadily doing something else all along. Then there is the plea that we must distinguish among imitative poems according to the object of imitation, the means of imitation and the manner of imitation. Imitation has proved a difficult term to handle, and among the Chicago Critics themselves, there seems to be some uncertainty. Thus Professor Crane

says that there are no imitations outside the sphere of human productions (LCSP, 48). Professor Olson, however, quotes the view of Aristotle that man is not the only imitative animal. (*Aristotle's Poetics and English Literature*, ed. Olson, Chicago, 1965, p. xiii, footnote.) Professor McKeon interprets Aristotle to mean that imitation, which is peculiar to the processes of art, is of particular things; it does not abstract universal forms, but imitates the form of individual things (CC, 161). Olson's view seems to be that imitation of the particular is mere copying, whereas poetic imitation is of the universal. The basic dissatisfaction with any exclusive theory of art as imitation is that it encourages us to look outside the poem to decide what it should be. Though Professor Crane assures us that Aristotle is not basing his poetics on a theory of imitation in any sense which would question the possibility of novelty in poetry or the title of the poet to be called a creator, his colleague, Professor McKeon talks nevertheless of the artist separating some form from the matter with which it is *joined* in nature, and *joining* it anew to the matter of his art. (CC, Phoenix edn., 132.) *Joining*, as Polonius would say, is an ill phrase, and one wonders whether Professor Crane's assurances are adequate. But it would be ungracious to expatiate on these doubts. The virtues of Aristotle have been pointed out and acknowledged often enough, though Professor Crane would have it that the acknowledgements are not worth much coming as they do from people who have not understood the Stagirite. Nevertheless one of the finest tributes to Aristotle, we may recall, was paid by Mr. Eliot in *The Sacred Wood*. Oddly enough it was not the method or system of Aristotle that drew Mr. Eliot's admiration; it was his universal intelligence; and "universal intelligence means that he could apply his intelligence to anything...; in whatever sphere of interest, he looked solely and steadfastly at the object; in his short and broken treatise he provides an eternal example—not of laws, or even of method, for there is no method except to be very intelligent, but of intelligence itself swiftly operating the analysis of sensation to the point of principle and definition." (*The Sacred Wood*, 11.) With that tribute, I am sure, Professor Crane would not like to find fault though he and his associates have tried valiantly to suggest that there *is* a system in Aristotle

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which can yield very necessary insights to a modern critic. Mr. Eliot's tribute encourages one to cultivate the intellectual virtue that is required to benefit from the wide variety of critical approaches available today. Such ability and willingness to profit from the wisdom and experience of others is the concluding theme of Professor Crane's Alexander Lectures.

The abridged edition of *Critics and Criticism* (Phoenix Books, University of Chicago Press, 1957) contains a selected list of writings other than those included in the volume of the original *Chicago Critics*: R. S. Crane, W. R. Keast, Norman MacLean, Richard McKeon, Elder Olson and Bernard Weinberg. The University of Chicago Press has recently published R. S. Crane's: *The Idea of the Humanities and Other Essays, Critical and Historical*, in two volumes; also *The Limits of Symbolism*, by Bernard Weinberg.

For criticism of the ideas of the *Chicago Critics*, the following may be consulted:

1. W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon*, Noonday, 1958, paperback edn.
2. Eliseo Vivas, *The Artistic Transaction*, Ohio State University Press, 1963
3. ———, *Creation and Discovery*, Noonday, 1955.
4. John Holloway, "The New and the Newer Critics," *Essays in Criticism*, V (1955), 355-381.



## CYCLES AND DIMENSIONS: THE PROGRESS OF AMERICAN LITERARY HISTORY \*

SUJIT MUKHERJEE

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THE PREFACE to the second edition (1953) of *Literary History of the United States* makes a deceptively simple statement : "The master plan of the work may thus be seen more clearly, it is hoped, as a *literary history* of the United States rather than as a *history of American Literature*" (italics mine). Behind the alternatives offered in this statement, behind the shift from one kind of record of America's literary past to another kind of record, lurks a quiet revolution in scholarship. Its battles were waged in the territory hedged in by the three books of *The Cambridge History of American Literature* and the three volumes of *LHUS*. Another way to gauge this advance would be to measure the ground covered between Fred Lewis Pattee's clarion cry, "A Call for a Literary Historian" (1924) and the quiet self-assurance of Robert E. Spiller's "A Letter to American Literary Historians" (1958). Perhaps the simplest study of all would be to read the several seminal essays of Professor Spiller on the subject to which he has devoted more than half of his seventy years. Whatever be the manner of study chosen, the writing of American literary history is worth examination as a natural and peculiar product of the applied imagination in America.

\* An earlier draft of this paper, limited to the 1920's, was presented at a symposium on "Renaissance in 'The Twenties'" held at Bombay in March 1966.

The theory and practice of literary history in modern America have commanded more time and energy of its intellectuals than in any other modern country of the world. The reasons for this may not be many or obscure. The accident of history which removed a portion of the fully developed culture of Western Europe and planted it on the North American continent gave America from the very beginning an acute consciousness about itself which most other civilizations have experienced only with the onset of middle age. No other civilization in the world has known its own origin so clearly; no other civilization began writing its history practically from the time its history began; no other civilization has been given the unique opportunity to identify itself. In literature, however, the distinction of being without precedence was not the blessing that it was in other areas of early American activity. American literature, sharing as it did the language of another nation and culture, was compelled to discover and define itself for reasons of sheer survival. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the task of writing the history of American literature should be so different from that of the historian of other literatures. The very concept of literary history in American terms has had to adjust itself to circumstances which distinguish America from other cultures.

The problem is somewhat mitigated by the fact that if American literature is a comparatively recent growth, modern literary history itself is a fairly recent concept. René Wellek places it no earlier than the heyday of the Romantic movement in Europe; he argues that the influence of the methods of the natural sciences began to be felt in literary study only in the nineteenth century, and explanation by causes led to the subversion of Neo-Classical criticism, making place for the kind of relativistic judgment which is basic to literary history.<sup>1</sup> And in connecting this general upheaval in literature to the particular realm of American letters, Douglas Bush states that in America "from about 1880 to about 1916 there was virtually a single movement in literary scholarship, that is, the writing of

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Scholarship : Its Aims and Methods*, eds. Norman Foerster et al (Chapel Hill, 1941), p. 96.

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literary history according to the genetic method, a method derived from European science and the literary stress on milieu."<sup>2</sup> Although the subject of this scholarship was not necessarily contemporary nor was it exclusively American, there is no doubt that the writing of literary history has a substantial tradition in American scholarship. After holding its own against and sometimes in support of various branches of literary criticism, literary history lost favour temporarily as a serious scholarly pursuit in the 1940's. But now that the lines of demarcation between literary criticism and literary history have been drawn much more clearly than ever before, now that "The Tigers of Wrath are wiser than the Horses of Instruction,"<sup>3</sup> it should be possible to see that, along with the New Critic and the Neo-Aristotelian, the Literary Historian is America's special contribution towards the understanding of literature.

A systematic study of the history of American literary history would have to examine the following five stages of its development :

(1) The need for a viable record of America's literary past rose partly out of the desire to demonstrate the national identity of American letters to non-Americans, and partly out of the desire to organize the proper evaluation and teaching of American literature to Americans. In order to argue the American achievements in literature, it automatically became necessary to formulate a system for containing and discussing these achievements.

(2) The demand for creating a satisfactory framework for the national literature of America provoked what might be called a literary history movement. Keeping in mind the peculiar circumstances of American literature, this movement travelled away from a chronological account of authors and books towards a discovery of ideas and forces embodied in American literary works.

(3) American literary history as a concept materialized only

<sup>2</sup> *Literary History and Literary Criticism*, ed. Leon Edel (New York, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> W. K. Wimsatt "Horses of Wrath: Recent Critical Lessons," *Essays in Criticism*, XII (January 1962), pp. 1-17.



when it was possible to see that mid-nineteenth century American writing constituted a genuine romantic movement belonging entirely to America. The credit for this discovery is generally attributed to Norman Foerster, especially to the two articles "The Advance of Romanticism" and "The Height of the Romantic Movement" he wrote for his anthology, *American Poetry and Prose* (original edition, 1925). But other literary historians of the time, like Lewis Mumford and Vernon L. Parrington, also noted the centrality of the American romantic movement to any large view of American literature, and nearly all literary historians since then have built their theses around the principal American romantics.

(4) The methods necessary to the formulation of literary history found analogies in the methods applied in the reinterpretation of the American past by scholars in other humanistic studies. If the European literary historian had taken his lead from the natural sciences, the American developed approaches tested out in modern historiography. The American historians' rejection of older points of view probably started with the Adams brothers, Henry and Brooks, and later in the nineteenth century, we have the exemplary use of a new point of view in the Turner thesis. But it is in the present century that the work of historians proper like Beard, the elder Schlesinger, Nevins, and others influenced the American literary historian and encouraged him to broaden his area of inquiry. The historians themselves were indebted to such "insurgent scholars" (to use Alfred Kazin's term) in other areas like John Fiske in philosophy, Lester Ward in sociology, Thorstein Veblen in economics, so that the evolution of literary history became an inevitable part of a much larger revolution in ideas about the American past.

(5) Finally, before the literary history movement had completed its normal life-cycle, it obtained a fresh and seemingly unlimited lease of life by getting absorbed into the American Studies movement. Born of inter-disciplinary cooperation, American Studies has drawn into its wide embrace not only the traditionally associated disciplines of literature, philosophy and history, but, widening out from economics and political science, it now enjoys the labours of such behavioral sciences as sociology, anthropology and psychology. In fact, practically any

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study which furthers an understanding of American culture has been welcome to the American Studies fold, and literary study has gained thereby an unparalleled range of reference and usable data.

Each of these five stages has a distinct history of its own, but for our purpose here it should be sufficient to indicate briefly the salient features of the first two stages. (In some ways, they contain the essence of the other three stages as well.)

The first stage may as well be called the American Literature Movement, because it did require the efforts of many persons over a considerable period of time before American literature could be identified as such and considered worthy of further study. The aspirations to nationhood aroused by the Revolution, grew from a purely political goal to cultural ambitions as well, and literature was among the obvious instruments of proclamation of independence. Just as even among those who had fought on the American side of the War of Independence there were many who did not conceive of total severance from the British crown, similarly among Americans of unquestioned patriotism long after independence there were many who could not conceive of a literature which was entirely home-grown and home-brewed. As late as 1809, the Phi Beta Kappa society of Dartmouth College heard Daniel Webster in his address "The State of Our Literature" dismiss the possibility that there was much merit in American literature as an indigenous product. Yet from the vantage point of today, it is easy to see that an organized approach to the establishment of a national literature had begun to manifest itself in several ways even in the eighteenth century:—in periodicals like *The Pennsylvania Magazine* (1775-1776); in literary groups like the Tuesday Club of Annapolis (1745-1756); in miscellanies of American writing like *The American Museum*, twelve volumes of which appeared between 1787 and 1792. These miscellanies were to be the forerunners of the great nineteenth-century anthologies of American writing which were to do double duty both as granaries of American literature and as its textbooks. The earliest of these, Samuel Kettel's *Specimens of American Poetry* (1829) in three volumes,

contained critical, biographical and bibliographical notes, and set a format which is followed even today with necessary modifications.

Although it was too early yet to think in terms of "teaching" American literature, the first attempt to write a history of American literature in book form was aimed at the classrooms. This was Samuel Knapp's ambitious work which came out in 1829, and its full title gives a clue to the pragmatic intentions of the author: *Lectures on American Literature, with Remarks on Some Passages of American History*. Knapp explains in the introduction that he had originally planned a large and comprehensive work but on second thoughts abandoned the project in favour of a single volume of ordinary size to be issued in a cheap edition so that it should be accessible to the American student. Thereby was struck the not always holy alliance between the historian of literature and the custodian of classrooms which has made the writing of literary history more often a practical proposition than a disinterested branch of scholarship.

It has been possible to trace back the college teaching of American literature to 1890 and earlier,<sup>4</sup> and among the earliest textbooks was John Seely Hart's *A Manual of American Literature* (1871). In addition to being considered an inferior branch of English literature, American literature had to struggle against the notion that only literature prior to 1800 was deserving of serious study. Consequently, American literature as a subject had to wait until after 1918 before it could win a regular place on the American undergraduate curriculum, and another twenty years before it was considered worthy of post-graduate study. As late as 1923, even an enthusiast like Norman Foerster had little reason to feel optimistic after compiling the first current bibliography (for 1922) of American literature. The list appeared in the March 1923 issue of *PMLA*, and Foerster appended this note to it: "The foregoing record is clearly an indication of the rapidly growing interest in American letters, although it must be admitted that this interest is more popular than scholarly. Substantial studies of American subjects are still rare."

<sup>4</sup> NCTE Report, *American Literature in the College Curriculum* (Chicago, 1948).

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The movement proceeded in the nineteenth century, therefore, without benefit of pedagogy. The compilations published by Rufus Griswold—of American poetry in 1842, and of American prose in 1847—became standard collections for writing up to that time, were revised and enlarged as time passed. Another foundation was laid when the two-volume *Cyclopaedia of American Literature* appeared in 1855, edited by Evert A. and George L. Duyckinck. If the *North American Review* had embodied an earlier phase in the advocacy and propagation of American writing, then the founding of the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897 gave vehicle and guidance to a more mature phase of the same development. The time was now ripe for a scholar who would take a historical view of the whole situation and erect the necessary structure for later literary historians to fill out and complete. This was accomplished by Moses Coit Tyler, doubly qualified for his task since he was a professor of English (at the University of Michigan, 1867-81) as well as of American History (at Cornell, 1881-1900). Tyler had, in his own words, to assume a very grave judicial as well as a very sacred responsibility in tackling the history of his nation's literature from the beginning to the Revolution. This great work in four volumes appeared between 1878 and 1897, and with Tyler we pass into the second stage of our consideration.

The second stage may itself be subdivided into two phases, with the *Cambridge History of American Literature* (CHAL) marking the line of demarcation. The earlier phase of the Literary History Movement—if it can be called a movement—would include works which regard themselves as histories of literature, while the latter phase marks the growing notion of literary history as a species of writing equally qualified to be literature or history. To devise an Emersonian proposition, if book-titles may be regarded as symbols of literary facts, then Tyler's titles suggest that the historian of American literature is faced by a choice between two alternatives.<sup>5</sup> It is significant that Tyler's works maintain a safe distance between their own time and the time they deal with, thus implying that a historical view of literature

<sup>5</sup> The titles are *A History of American Literature, 1607-1815*, 2 vols; *The Literary History of the American Revolution, 1763-1783*, 2 vols.

requires to be filtered through an adequate temporal gap. Such an implication is not conceded by Charles F. Richardson, whose history of American literature appeared within a decade of Tyler's first two volumes and extended its purview up to its own time.<sup>6</sup> In other ways, too, Richardson differed from Tyler. Whereas Tyler's was chiefly a historical inquiry, Richardson concerned himself more with literary judgment. This foreshortening of view in terms of literary merit alone resulted in Richardson's devoting "ten times more space" to nineteenth-century American writing than to the colonial period. Neither, however, succeeded in postulating American literature as distinct from that other and better known literature written in English. Whether because of Richardson or not, Tyler's subsequent work is quite different in emphasis, in so far as it treats literary writing as one kind of record of a period of American history which is important for non-literary reasons. Between them, Tyler and Richardson ploughed the soil on which later historians of American literature would reap as they sowed.

“A large and varied crop appeared during the first two decades of the twentieth century, offering rich harvest to the future historian of histories. The frequency of appearance of such works between 1900 and 1915 lends substance to the conjecture that a conscious literary history movement was demonstrably in progress.<sup>7</sup> The period opens with Barrett Wendell, who narrowed down Richardson's attention to mid-nineteenth-century writing even further to an exclusive region in the northeastern United States. Two better balanced studies followed in 1903—one by William P. Trent, who combined and condensed in a single volume the areas covered in six volumes by Tyler and Richardson; the other by George E. Woodberry, which makes a determined attempt to abandon the chronological account of American literature in favour of indicating its uniqueness. Such is also the attempt of John Macy five years later; his critical estimates

<sup>6</sup> *American Literature, 1607-1885* (New York, 1887-88), 2 vols.

<sup>7</sup> Works cited are Wendell, *A Literary History of America*; Trent, *A History of American Literature, 1607-1865*; Woodberry, *America in Literature*; Macy, *The Spirit of American Literature*; Brownell, *American Prose Masters*; Cairns, *A History of American Literature*; Pattee, *A History of American Literature Since 1870*.

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of sixteen major authors from Irving to Henry James are guided by the design of placing them according to their peculiarly American achievements. The following year W. C. Brownell broke new ground in literary history by using only major prose writers in a systematic analysis of the cultural past of America. Towards the end of this prolific period we have the works by William B. Cairns and Fred Lewis Pattee,<sup>8</sup> both of whom take their stand firmly in the present to look back upon the past.

All these individual and independent efforts were drawn into the vast bowels of the *Cambridge History*, whose four volumes appeared between 1917 and 1921 to mark the end of an era.<sup>8</sup> Edited by a board of four scholars and containing some sixty-odd separate essays by various contributors, it is the first comprehensive account of writing in America—even including writing not necessarily literary. Of the four distinctions of the work, claimed in the editorial, the fourth is worth quoting because it summarizes what the massive work intended but failed to be, namely “a survey of the life of the American people as expressed in their writings rather than a history of *belles-lettres* alone.” Its determined inclusiveness was achieved at the cost of discrimination in subject matter, while no precautions were taken against the danger of multiple parts not relating to a complex whole. Perhaps the very plan to do something for American literature on the lines of what had been done for English literature was defective, because the plan does not allow for the odd character of American literature. The exhaustive bibliographies provided in the earlier editions of the *CHAL* have frequently been praised more than the essays themselves. However, as a collective scholarly enterprise, it undoubtedly offered a shape of things to come.

“Sometime between 1910 and 1920,” Professor Spiller tells us, “American literature ‘came of age.’”<sup>9</sup> This is the period which prefaces America’s so-called second literary renaissance, and it was during these years that Americans turned from writing the history of their literature to rewriting their literary history. Dates are unreliable mileposts in such fluid phenomena as lite-

<sup>8</sup> Now in its twenty-eighth reprint and available as a single volume, but without the bibliographies.

<sup>9</sup> *The Cycle of American Literature* (New York, 1962), p. 211.

rary movements, but the appearance of Van Wyck Brooks' *America's Coming of Age* in 1915 does suggest that a revaluation of American literature by Americans had begun even while the older valuation was in the process of being perpetuated in the volumes of *CHAL*. Brooks urged recognition of the vital need to link works of the American imagination to deeds of American life, and out of this fadical realignment of literature to life was born the peculiarly domestic concept of American literary history. Meanwhile, the re-examination of American literature was being given an official standing. The same year in which the final volume of *CHAL* appeared, the American Literature Group was founded as part of the Modern Language Association. One of the founders, Fred Lewis Pattee, sent out his famous call in *American Mercury* of June 1924, dismissing the "nearly a hundred histories of American literature" on his shelves and laying down what he called the "ten commandments" for the new literary historian.<sup>10</sup> At the December 1925 MLA conference, Norman Foerster read a paper on "Factors in American Literary History" and gave to all future aspirants the four indispensable counters with which to play the game of American literary history—namely, the Puritan tradition, the frontier spirit, romanticism, and realism. Both Pattee's article and Foerster's paper were reproduced in what is perhaps the central document of the movement—the collection of essays published in 1928 under the title *The Reinterpretation of American Literature*, edited by Norman Foerster.<sup>11</sup> One of the contributors, Harry Hayden Clark, speaks of "the crying need for at least one learned journal devoted exclusively to material bearing on American literature," and an editorial footnote states that the need will soon be met by the quarterly journal *American Literature*, which began being issued from the Duke University Press from 1929.<sup>12</sup>

Even before the movement had gathered momentum, it was to receive an example as well as a warning from the first volume of Vernon Louis Parrington's *Main Currents in American*

<sup>10</sup> Enumerated in the present writer's "The Literary History Movement," *Renaissance in "The Twenties"* (Bombay, 1966), pp. 70-71.

<sup>11</sup> Reissued in 1959 with a preface by Robert P. Falk.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190. Clark later edited a similar collection of essays, *Transitions in American Literary History* (New York, 1954).

*Thought*, which was published in 1927. Parrington had begun his work in 1913, the year of publication of Charles Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, and the influence of Beard upon Parrington's scheme is generally accepted. Other models available to Parrington were Hippolyte Taine's interpretation of English literature and George Brandes' interpretation of European literature, but Parrington went further than either of them in the rigour with which he applied his thesis and the confidence with which he produced his proofs. For many years Parrington's work was to be regarded as a history of American literature, although Parrington's clear intention was to use American literature as evidence of his analysis of the dualism of political and economic rivalry in main currents of American thought. Parrington's concept of literature seems to embrace theology, economics, law, politics, and journalism as well as literary writing, whereby he was able to treat literature as a mirror of American life. But in extending the very concept of literature, he precluded specifically literary judgment. Important as Parrington's work is as American intellectual history, it is a perpetual reminder to the literary historian that no breadth of reference is enough to compensate for the absence of literary evaluation.

The ten commandments of Pattee gave the movement its manifesto. But as is true of some older commandments given to ordinary mortals, these directives to the literary historian could not have been expected to be fulfilled to the last letter. Or, the very magnitude of his home task inhibited the aspiring literary historian from filling the magnificent role designed for him by Pattee. The fact remains that in spite of the vigour and earnestness with which the literary history movement had started in the 1920's, it had to wait until 1941 when the publication of F. O. Matthiessen's classic, *American Renaissance*, demonstrated that the grand design was attainable. Mention, however, must be made of others who preceded Matthiessen and worked upon smaller units and concepts of the large and seemingly inaccessible pattern. For example, Edmund Wilson demonstrated in the introductory chapter of *Axel's Castle* (1931) that the revolution wrought in modern literature by the symbolist movement had been foreshadowed in the techniques of Poe, Hawthorne,



Melville, Whitman and Emerson; or Granville Hicks in *The Great Tradition* (1933), where his early enthusiasm for Marxist theory inspires him to view recent American literature in the light of Marxist propositions; or Malcolm Cowley who focussed his attention upon nearer times in *Exile's Return* (1934) and summed up the experience of contemporary writers as giving literary expression to the myth of the "lost generation." Other features of American literature were examined in totally dissimilar ways in the first volume of Perry Miller's *The New England Mind* and Bernard Smith's *Forces in American Criticism*, both of which appeared in 1939. Throughout the decade, therefore—a decade so marked by the battles of books and bookmen—the movement was kept alive in works which made no attempt to grapple with the entire landscape (as required in Pattee's second commandment), but which explored restricted areas with great success. If Matthiessen's achievement in *American Renaissance* is any example, the new concept of literary history must deal not with the entire history of a nation's writing but with chosen, significant periods.

The logical culmination of the literary history movement came in 1940 when an editorial board consisting of Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson and Henry Seidel Canby came together for the first time to discuss a project whose completion would mark the definitive end of an upsurge in American letters which had lasted for nearly half a century. The work was three years in planning, required five more years to be written by forty-eight contributors, and appeared in 1948 as *Literary History of the United States (LHUS)*. The multiple authorship emulates the plan of the *CHAL*, but the total character of an integrated work so wanting in the earlier enterprise was achieved here by the provision of numerous intermediary chapters and by skilful editing of the main chapters. While no major author was neglected, minor writing as well as the instruments of literary production were given due place. Above all, the adoption of "an organic view of literature as the record of human experience and of its history as the portrait of a people" (as stated in the 1953 preface) has given an integrating personality to the whole which the piece-meal manner of its composition affects only negligibly. Also, as we read the essays separately,

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we realize that the deliberately restricted exercises in literary history carried out by writers like Edmund Wilson and Cowley and Matthiessen were pathfinders to *LHUS* and not indices of failure of the movement to produce a masterwork commensurate with its intention. The sixty-odd pieces which constitute the original *LHUS* could not have been welded into the total structure unless the exploratory smaller work done by and during the movement had already traced and tested the outlines.

Neither of the two subsequent editions of *LHUS* (1953, 1963) called for a revision of the main text, and I take this as further proof of how conclusively the main movement came to an end in 1948. The post-script added to the 1953 edition was revised and split up to make two chapters terminating the 1963 edition. Future decades will probably continue to add post-scripts without any substantial alteration to the original frame except what is demanded by considerations of practical size. Already the bulk is intimidating, strenuous both to the reader's arms as well as to his imagination.

Meanwhile, energies of the modern literary historian in America have been released towards engagement in intensified search for generalizations in selected areas and forms of American literature. In works such as Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950) R. W. B. Lewis' *The American Adam* (1955), Perry Miller's *The Raven and the Whale* (1956)—to mention only three outstanding examples—the practice of American literary history has developed a genre and also attained an excellence which have few parallels outside that country. The deceptively small timespan of American literature is an irresistible temptation to the mythic minds of historians, but the special ability of the American imagination to construct an illuminating and workable hypothesis about its literary past places American literary history in a class by itself.

Most devoted and persevering among literary historians who responded to Fred Lewis Pattee's challenge, Professor Spiller has time and again sharpened the scrutiny of America's literary record. While outlining the task in 1935, he underlined the need for proper background analyses of literature, so that American writings may be related to America's national origins and development in philosophical, economic, social, political and cultural

terms.<sup>13</sup> His blueprint of 1941 traced the dual course of America's national history which in turn demanded the writing of a dual literary history.<sup>14</sup> The by-product of his association with the *LHUS* project during 1940-1948 was the cyclic theory of American literature, published in 1955.<sup>15</sup> His "letter" of 1958 admits the textual bias of criticism into literary history which, however, "must retain a sense of the autonomy of the immediate cultural context of every work of art."<sup>16</sup> And his latest statement on the subject, in 1963, exalts the literary historian to the status of a literary artist in his own right.<sup>17</sup>

To the three dimensions of Professor Spiller's concept of literary history, one is tempted to add a fourth: the view of American literature from abroad. Foreign views of American literature date back to Philarete Chasles (1851), John Nichol (1882), and Karl Knortz (1891), and have continued in our own time with the slighter efforts of Heinrich Straumann, Marcus Cunliffe, and Cyrille Arnavon.<sup>18</sup> A substantial modern literary history by a non-American would be a valuable complement to what Americans themselves have written.

<sup>13</sup> "The Task of the Historian of American Literature", a paper read before the American Literature Group of the MLA and published in *Sewanee Review* XLIII (1935), 70-79. Reprinted in Spiller, *The Third Dimension: Studies in Literary History* (New York, 1965).

<sup>14</sup> "Blueprint for American Literary History," a paper read at the Centennial Celebration of Fordham University in 1941, first published in *Pennsylvania Literary Review*, VIII (1957). Reprinted in *The Third Dimension*.

<sup>15</sup> *The Cycle of American Literature*, first published in 1955.

<sup>16</sup> "A Letter to American Literary Historians," written to Chairman of the American Literature Group of the MLA and read by him at the annual luncheon of the group. Published in *The Third Dimension*.

<sup>17</sup> "The Province of Literary History," in *The Aims and Methods of Scholarship in Modern Language and Literatures*, edited by James Thorpe and published by MLA, 1963.

<sup>18</sup> Works cited are Chasles, *Etudes sur la Litterature et les Moeurs des Anglo-Américains au XIX e Siecle* (Paris, 1851); Nichol, *American Literature: An Historical Sketch, 1620-1881* (Edinburgh, 1882); Knortz, *Geschichte der Nordamerikanischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1891), 2 vols.; Straumann, *American Literature in the Twentieth Century*, (London, 1951); Arnavon, *Histoire litteraire des Etats-Unis* (Paris, 1953); Cunliffe, *The Literature of the United States* (London, 1954).

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Similarly, while a third cycle to the previous two in American literary history has not yet become apparent, two smaller cycles are currently most noticeable. These are the cycles described by Negro writing and by Jewish writing, and a charting of these subsidiary movements would enlarge the organic view of the literature of the United States.



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## APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A

### INDIAN DISSERTATIONS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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#### I. COMPLETED

- Chari, V. K., "Whitman and Indian Thought." Banaras, 1960.
- Ganguli, Ashok Kumar, "Walt Whitman : The Rebel Poet." Agra, 1962.
- George, A. G., "T. S. Eliot: His Mind and Art." Bombay, 1960.
- Gupta, R. K., "Form and Style in Herman Melville's *Pierre: or the Ambiguities*." Pittsburgh, 1964.
- Guruprasad, Thakur, "The Mask of Liberty." Denver, 1965.
- Hoskot, S. S., "T. S. Eliot—His Mind and Personality." Bombay, 1957.
- Kallapur, S. T., "Ernest Hemingway: A Study in the Transition from Nihilism to Cosmic Humanism." Karnatak, 1964.
- Kaul, A. N., "The Image of Actual Society and Ideal Community in 19th Century American Fiction." Yale, 1962.
- Krishnamurthi, M. G., "Katherine Anne Porter: A Study in Themes." Wisconsin, 1966.
- Mahajan, M. L., "Studies in the Dramas of Tennessee Williams." Nagpur, 1968.
- Mitra, S. N., "T. S. Eliot and the Classical Tradition in English Criticism." Calcutta, 1963.
- Mukherjee, Sujit "The Reception of Rabindranath Tagore in the United States, 1912-14." Pennsylvania, 1963.
- Nath, Raj, "Coleridge and Modern Criticism." (includes chapters on American critics.) Banaras, 1967.
- Raghavacharyulu, D. V. K., "The Achievement of Eugene O'Neill" (The Dramatist as a Seeker). Pennsylvania, 1959.
- Ramamurthy, V., "T. S. Eliot as Literary Critic." Vikram, 1965.
- Ranchan, Som Prakash, "Walt Whitman." Wisconsin, 1965.
- Rao, N. Krishna "The Idea of Refinement in the Novels of Henry James." Andhra, 1965.
- Rao, B. Ramachandra, "The American Fictional Hero in the Novels of Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, Farrell, Dos Passos and Wolfe." Andhra, 1965.



- Rao, V. Ramakrishna, "Emerson: His Muse and Message." Calcutta, 1936.
- Sachs, Viola, "Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*: A Study in Matter and Form." Delhi, 1961.
- Satyanarayana, T. V., "Walt Whitman: A Study of the Problem of Self and Expression in *Leaves of Grass*." Andhra, 1962.
- Sen, J. P., "T. S. Eliot as a Critic." Jabalpur, 1966.
- Sen, M. K., "T. S. Eliot's Theory of the Objective Correlative." Calcutta, 1962.
- Sen, Mrs. N. D., "The Reception of Rabindranath Tagore in England, France, Germany and the United States." Indiana, 1964.
- Sen, S. K., "Metaphysical Tradition and T. S. Eliot." Calcutta, 1963.
- Seshachari, C., "Gandhi and the American Scene." Utah, 1964.
- Sharma, R. K., "Forms and Techniques in Eugene O'Neill's Plays." Vikram, 1966.
- Shetty, Mrs. Nalini V., "The Fiction of Wright Morris." Pittsburgh, 1965.
- Singh, D. P., "The Influence of F. H. Bradley on T. S. Eliot." Patna, 1966.
- Singh, Hari, "Time and Man in Thomas Wolfe." Osmania, 1966.
- Singh, M. M., "Emerson and India." Pennsylvania, 1946.
- Sinha, K. N., "Themes and Images in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*." Arkansas, 1956.
- Subramanyam, N. S., "English Poetical Plays: A Study, 1850-1950." Agra, 1959. (includes chapters on American verse drama).
- Vaid, K. B., "Technique in the Tales of Henry James." Harvard, 1963.
- Wankhade, M. N., "Whitman and Tantrism: A Comparative Study." Florida, 1965.

## II. IN PROGRESS

- Agarwal, H. N., "Racial Themes in American Drama, 1920-1960." Meerut.
- Agrawal, D. D., "Poetry of Robert Frost: An Aspect." Bhagalpur.
- Ahuja, Chaman Lal, "Tragedy, Modern Temper and O'Neill." Panjab.
- Alexander, Mrs. Molly, "Eugene O'Neill's Conception of Tragedy in Theory and Practice." Bombay.
- Amist, R. P., "Pearl S. Buck: A Critical Study of Her Major Works." Patna.
- Ansari, Mrs. Zeba, "The Negro in William Faulkner." Osmania.
- Anwar, Saquib, "Edward Carpenter and Whitman." Marathwada.
- Asthana, B. K., "John Dos Passos: The Social Genre in American Fiction." Bhagalpur.
- Asthana, R. K., "Henry James's Theory of the Novel." Banaras.
- Badve, V. V., "John Steinbeck." Shivaji.
- Bais, H. S. S., "The Art of Stephen Crane." Saugar.
- Banerjee, P. N., "Concept of Man in Tagore and Emerson." Kashi Vid-yapith.
- Batra, Miss Prem, "Political Thought of Henry David Thoreau." Meerut.
- Bhagwat, A. K., "A Study of Approaches in Selected Indian and American

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- Biographies." Shivaji.
- Bhalla, B. M., "The Dramatic Achievement of Arthur Miller." Delhi.
- Bhelande, Mrs. N. U., "The Technique of O'Neill's Plays." Marathwada.
- Chaitanya, "The Theatre of the Absurd with Special Reference to Beckett, Ionesco and Albee." Jodhpur.
- Chakrabarty, S. S., "Sinclair Lewis: Novelist." Bhagalpur.
- Chakravorthy, T. K., "O'Neill, the writer of Tragedies," Utkal.
- Chandra, Suresh, "Hawthorne—A Study of His Major Novels." Lucknow.
- Chari, V. V., "Henry James as a Playwright: An Evaluation." Osmania.
- Das, S., "Emerson and Indian Thought." Panjab.
- Das, S. K., "Certain 'Spiritualistic Trends' in the Poetry of Walt Whitman." Bhagalpur.
- Deshmukh, D. G., "Henry David Thoreau and Indian Thought." Nagpur.
- Devi, Mrs. L. Leela, "Satire and Social Protest in Sinclair Lewis." Osmania.
- Dudha, Miss K. M., "The Plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams." Gujarat.
- Dutta, K. C., "Expressionism in American Drama: From O'Neill to Tennessee Williams." Delhi.
- Dutta, T. R., "The Human Image in Modern American Drama." Andhra.
- George, Jacob, "Tennessee Williams: The Themes and Structure of His Plays." Birla Inst. of Technology and Science.
- Govardhan, A. M., "Robert Lowell: Poetic Theory and Practice." Osmania.
- Goyal, B. S., "The Dramatic Art of Eugene O'Neill." Agra.
- Guha, S., "The Theme of Isolation in American Fiction with Special Reference to Hemingway." Calcutta.
- Gupta, Ashok, "Sinclair Lewis as a Novelist of Ideas." Agra.
- Gupta, D. C., "John F. Kennedy as a Man of Letters." Agra.
- Gupta, O. P., "Whitman and Indian Thought." Agra.
- Jafri, Mrs. Sabiha, "Stephen Crane: A Critical Study." Osmania.
- Jha, D., "The Tragic Harvest in the Plays of Arthur Miller." Bihar.
- Joseph, Vasanth, "Guilt and Sin in Hawthorne and Melville: A Comparative Study." Osmania.
- Kalyanam, Mrs. N., "Ellen Glasgow: The Break with Tradition." Osmania.
- Kapoor, S. D., "The Negro Theme in American Literature." Jodhpur.
- Karim, N. A., "Novels of Theodore Dreiser." Kerala.
- Katoti, G. H., "Ernest Hemingway as a Novelist." Baroda.
- Kaushal, J., "Hemingway's Characters—A Study in Growth and Development." Punjabi.
- Khanduri, Mrs. Savitri, "Tradition and Experiment in the Poetry of Robert Frost." Saugar.
- Kochaar, M. L., "The Critical ideas of T. S. Eliot." Delhi.
- Kohli, R. K., "Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot." Pennsylvania.
- Krishna, Miss S. F., "The Tragic Vision of Tennessee Williams." Delhi.
- Kulkarni, V. S., "Achievement of Tennessee Williams." Osmania.
- Kulshreshta, Chirantan, "T. S. Eliot as a Poet-Critic." Udaipur.
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- Mallikarjunan, S., "Dramatic Theory and Practice of T. S. Eliot." Saugar.
- Manvi, Raghavendra, "Arthur Miller." Osmania.
- Mavinkurve, Mrs. Neila, "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Women: Dream and Disillusionment." Osmania.
- Mehar, S. S., "Cleanth Brooks and Yvor Winters: A Comparative Study of their Critical Positions." Delhi.
- Mir, M. H., "Maxwell Anderson and American Poetic Drama." Indore.
- Mishra, Ajitkumar, "Loneliness in Modern American Fiction." Bhagalpur.
- Mitra, B. K., "The Contemporary Negro Novel in America." Calcutta.
- Mookerjee, R. N., "Theodore Dreiser—A Study of His Thought and Social Criticism." Rajasthan.
- Moorthy, S. Radhakrishna, "T. S. Eliot and the Revival of Poetic Drama." Osmania.
- Nand, Rameshwar, "An Examination of Major Philosophical Ideas in Whitman's Poetry." Ravishankar.
- Narayan, R. D., "Creation of a Myth for Action in the Works of Hemingway." Bihar.
- Narayanachar, K. S., "Indian Thought in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats and Eliot." Mysore.
- Nema, R. K., "A Critical Study of Ernest Hemingway as a Novelist." Ravishankar.
- Nihalani, P. K., "Synecdochical Patterns in Robert Frost." Marathwada.
- Ojha, Bhagwanjee, "Henry James." Magadh.
- Pal, J., "New Criticism in America with Special Reference to Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, and John Crowe Ransom." Birla Institute.
- Pal, Mani Mohan, "Edgar Allan Poe." Calcutta.
- Paliwal, B. B., "The Poetic Revolution of the Twenties." Udaipur.
- Paliwal, G. S. D., "The Treatment of the Negro in Modern American Fiction, 1914-1964." Agra.
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- Patnaik, Mrs. Ira, "Mixed Patterns in Frost's Poetry." Calcutta.
- Pattarkine, Mrs., "Emerson's Concept of Poetry." Nagpur.
- Pavaskar, S. R., "The Tales of Edgar Allan Poe: A Thematic Study." Indore.
- Peerzade, H. A., "The Novels of D. H. Lawrence—A Psychological Study with Special Reference to His Influence on American Literature." Shivaji.
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- Prasad V. R. N., "Faulkner and the Human condition." Marathwada.

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- Raj, G. R., "Spiritual Quest as Recurring Theme in Eugene O'Neill." Osmania.
- Rajamani, V., "A Study of Sinclair Lewis as a Novelist." Allahabad.
- Rajasekharaiah, T. R., "The Roots of Whitman's Grass." Karnatak.
- Ramakrishna, D., "Technique in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe." Banaras.
- Rao, A. V., "Poetic Realism in John Steinbeck." (A Study of the Animal Motivation in Human Conduct as Presented in His Novels). Indore.
- Rao, B. Damodar, "Conceptual Enactment: Emerson's Essays as Literary Art." Mysore.
- Rao, D. N., "Hemingway's Concept of Life Based on a Study of His Short Stories." Nagpur.
- Rao, D. Poornachandra, "Loneliness and Isolation in Tennessee Williams." Andhra.
- Rao, P. G. Rama, "The Narrative Technique of Ernest Hemingway." Utkal.
- Rodrigues, E. L., "Saul Bellow." Pennsylvania.
- Roy, V. K., "T. S. Eliot and Modern English Poetry." Bihar.
- Sachithanandan, V., "Whitman and Bharati: A Comparative Study." Annamalai.
- Safir, J. M., "The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald: their Mythological, Contemporary and Personal Roots." Agra.
- Salunke, V. G., "The Poetry of Robert Frost." Poona.
- Sastry, C. N., "Walt Whitman : A Study of Modernist Trends." Osmania.
- Satyannarayana, M. R., "The Element of Compassion in the Works of John Steinbeck." Osmania.
- Savadi, S. S., "The Verse Plays of Maxwell Anderson." Poona.
- Sethi, S. S., "The Negro in American Drama." Delhi.
- Shankar, D. A., "New Criticism with Special Reference to R. P. Blackmur." Mysore.
- Sharma, D. R., "The Empirical Ethics of Ernest Hemingway." Panjab.
- Sheriar, Mrs. Khorshed, "The Spiritual Dimension of O'Neill's Drama." Delhi.
- Shukla, J. N., "The Leftist Element in the Novels of John Steinbeck and Dos Passos." Gujarat.
- Singh, Amritjit, "The Hemingway Hero : His Evolution and Development." Delhi.
- Singh, Gopal, "Hemingway the Novelist." Agra.
- Singh, Gurbhagat, "The Ontological Meaning in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot." Delhi.
- Singh, S., "The American Novels of World War II." Birla Institute.
- Sivaramakrishna, M., "Fitzgerald Hero: The Anatomy of Crack-up." Osmania.
- Srivastava, A. K., "New Criticism: A Critical Evolution." Gauhati.
- Srivastava, R. K., "The Concept of Fate in the Works of Ernest Hemingway." Jiwaji.
- Srivastava, V. K., "Hemmingway." Kashi Vidyapith.
- Subbian, C., "Characterization in Edwin Arlington Robinson." Osmania.

- Sud, G. R., "Experiments of Eugene O'Neill." Panjab.
- Suryanarayan, N., "The Fiction of John Updike." Marathwada.
- Taranath, R., "The Image in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot." Mysore.
- Thakkar, V. P., "John Steinbeck as a Novelist." Sardar Patel.
- Thota, Anand Rao, "Emily Dickinson and the Metaphysical Tradition." Osmania.
- Tewari, S. K., "William Faulkner's Championship of the Negroes." Agra.
- Towheed, M. Q., "Death Theme in Emily Dickinson." Bhagalpur.
- Trikha, Miss Manorama, "Robert Frost's Vision of Life as Revealed in His Poetry." Meerut.
- Tripathi, J. P., "Ernest Hemingway: A Study in His Evolution." Gorakhpur.
- Upadhyaya, R. D., "Robert Frost: A Critical Study of His Poetry with Special Reference to His Craftsmanship and Thought." Agra.
- Vaidyanathan, T. G., "Hemingway's Tragic Vision." Osmania.
- Venkatachari, Mrs. K. S., "The World of Katherine Anne Porter." Osmania.
- Verma, K. D., "Quest for Belief in Eugene O'Neill." Panjab.
- Verma, K. G., "Alienation in the Works of Saul Bellow—A Study of the Individual's Predicament in American Society." Delhi.
- Verma, Mrs. Meenakshi, "Human Significance in the Poetry of Robert Frost." Ravishankar.
- Verma, N. S., "Symbol and Image in Hart Crane." Ravishankar.
- Waghmare, J. M., "The Problem of Identity and Integration in American Negro Fiction, 1945-1965." Marathwada.

## APPENDIX B

### INDIAN PUBLICATIONS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

---

- Alcott, Louisa M. *Little Women*. With an introd. by Nalini V. Shetty. New Delhi: Eurasia, 1967.
- Chari, V. K. *Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism: An Interpretation*. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1964.
- Congress for Cultural Freedom, T. S. Eliot. Bombay: Manaktalas [c 1965]. Papers and proceedings of a seminar held at St. Stephen's College, 1965.
- Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Deerslayer*. With an introd. by Sujit Mukherjee. New Delhi: Eurasia [c 1967].
- Crane, Stephen. *The Red Badge of Courage*. With an introd. by Shiv K. Kumar. New Delhi: Eurasia, 1964.
- Dickinson, Emily. *An Amazing Sense; Selected Poems and Letters*. Selection and introd. by J. R. Vitelli. Bombay: Popular Prakashan [c 1966].
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *An Emerson Reader*. Edited by Nissim Ezekiel. Bombay: Popular Prakashan [1965].
- Essays: First and Second Series*. With an introd. by Shiv K. Kumar. New Delhi: Eurasia, 1965.
- Fisher, William, and others, ed. *American Literature of the Nineteenth Century; An Anthology*. New Delhi: Eurasia [c 1965].
- George, A. G. T. S. Eliot; *His Mind and Art*. With a foreword by B. Rajan. Bombay: Asia Pub. House [c 1962].
- Hawthorne, Manning, ed. *American Literary Scene*. Bombay: Popular Book Depot [1962].
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. With an introd. by R. K. Gupta. New Delhi: Eurasia, 1966.
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- Holmes, Oliver W. *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*. With an introd. by M. K. Naik. New Delhi: Eurasia, 1967.

- Hoskot, S. S. T. S. *Eliot; His Mind and Personality*. Bombay: Univ. of Bombay, 1961.
- Howells, William D. *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. With an introd. by K. P. Saradhi. New Delhi: Eurasia, 1967.
- James, Henry. *Portrait of a Lady*. With an introduction by Raj K. Kohli. New Delhi: Eurasia, 1966.
- James, Henry. *The American*. With an introd. By Hari Singh. New Delhi: Eurasia, 1967.
- Kaul, A. N., ed. *Hawthorne: A Collection of Critical Studies*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall [c 1966].
- *The American Vision: Actual and Ideal Society in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963.
- Lal, P., ed. *T. S. Eliot; Homage from India; A Commemoration Volume of 55 Essays and Elegies*. Calcutta: Writer's Workshop [c 1965].
- Literary Criterion* (Periodical). *Special Number on American Literature*. Editor, C. D. Narasimhaiah. Guest editors, William Mulder and S. Nagarajan. (Mysore: Mysore Univ., 1962). v. 5, no. 3.
- *Essays on American Literature*; presented to Dr. Olive I. Reddick. Editor, C. D. Narasimhaiah. (Mysore: Mysore Univ., 1964). v. 6, no. 2.
- Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick, or The White Whale*. Introd. by Raj K. Kohli. New Delhi: Eurasia, 1966.
- Nambiar, O. K., *Walt Whitman and Yoga*. Bangalore: Jeevan Publications, 1966.
- Nandakumar, Prema. *The Glory and the Good; Essays on Literature*. Bombay: Asja Pub. House [c 1965]. Chapters on Frost, Whitman, Faulkner and Steinbeck.
- Narasimhaiah, C. D., ed. *Indian Response to American Literature*. New Delhi: United States Educational Foundation in India, 1967.
- Narayan, Shriman. *The Tragedy of a Wall*. New Delhi: Chand [1963]. Chapters on Einstein, Buck and Dewey.
- Oliver, Egbert S., ed. *American Literature, 1890-1965; An Anthology*. Original selection by William J. Fisher and Krishna B. Vaid and others. Foreword by M. S. Doraiswami, preface by Olive I. Reddick. With an introd. New Delhi: Eurasia [c 1967].
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## APPENDIX C

### THE CONTRIBUTORS

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Among his publications are : *Aldous Huxley, The Later Poems of Tagore, Metaesthetics and other Essays*, and *Mystics and Society*. Just published : *Mine Oyster : Essays and Encounters*. He has also edited : *Faith of a Poet, Tagore for You. Selections from Lewis Mumford and Selections from Arnold Toynbee*.

NARESH GUHA (Ph. D., Northwestern, 1962) is Professor and Head of the Department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, Calcutta, where he edits the *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*. He did research work in the United States on Fulbright (1959-60) and Rockefeller Foundation (1960-62) fellowships. His dissertation on "W. B. Yeats: An Indian Approach" has been published by Jadavpur University. He is at work on a critical reassessment of Tagore.

R. K. GUPTA (Ph. D., Pittsburgh, 1964) is Assistant Professor of English at Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. He studied in the United States on Fulbright and Andrew Mellon fellowships and wrote a doctoral dissertation on Herman Melville. He has written the critical introduction to the Indian edition of *The Scarlet Letter* (Eurasia, 1966) and has published articles in *Emerson Society Quarterly*, *ASRC Newsletter*, and *Kyushu American Literature* (Japan). His article "Hawthorne's Theory of Art" will appear in *American Literature* early in 1969.

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR (D. Litt., Madras, 1939) has been, till recently, Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University and Honorary Professor of English there. He has lectured at Leeds University (1959) and represented India at the East-West Symposium and P.E.N. World Congress at Tokyo-Kyoto in 1957. Among his numerous publications are *Lytton Strachey : A Critical Study* (1938), *Sri Aurobindo* (1945), *Gerald Manley Hopkins : The Man and Poet* (1948), *Indian Writing in English* (1962), *The Adventure of Criticism* (1962), which devotes a number of essays to American writers, *Shakespeare : His World and his Art* (1964), *Rabindranath Tagore* (1965), and, most recently, an *Introduction to the Study of English Literature* (1966), in collaboration with his daughter Dr. Prema Nandakumar.

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V. Y. KANTAK is Professor and Head, Department of English, and Dean, Faculty of Arts, at the M. S. University of Baroda. He has been an executive member of the Indian Association for English Studies and was elected Life Fellow of the International Institute of Arts and Letters in Switzerland. In 1961 and 1968 he was invited to read a paper for the International Shakespeare Conference at Stratford. In 1968-69 he was invited to become ASRC's first Senior Scholar-in-Residence. Among his publications are "An Approach to Shakespearan Tragedy" in the *Shakespeare Survey* 16, and articles on Yeats, Frost, and the New Criticism.

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DARSHAN SINGH MAINI (Ph. D., Panjab, 1961), is Professor and Head of the Department of English at the Punjabi University, Patiala. His doctoral dissertation on "The Political Novel in England: 1920-1950" will be published shortly. Besides editing *American Literature: A Miscellany* (USEFI, New Delhi) and *Guru Gobind Singh* by Professor Puran Singh (Sikh Centre, California), he has contributed papers to *The Achievement of Rex Warner*, edited by Professor A. L. McLeod (Wentworth Press, Sydney, Australia) and *Indian Response to American Literature* edited by Prof. C. D. Narasimhaiah (USEFI, New Delhi).

R. N. MEHTA is Reader in English at the M. S. University of Baroda. He was a Fulbright Smith-Mundt Fellow at Columbia University in 1961-62. He has contributed the critical introductions to *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* in the Indian reprint series in English, has written articles on American literature which have appeared in *The Literary Criterion* and *Indian Response to American Literature*. He taught in the intensive summer course at ASRC in 1966.

SUJIT MUKHERJEE (Ph. D., Pennsylvania, 1963) is Reader in English at the University of Poona. He has taught at Patna University (1952-1966). He studied in the United States (1960-63) as a Fulbright Smith-Mundt Scholar and a Harrison Fellow, completing a dissertation at Pennsylvania on Tagore's critical reception in the United States, which has been published as *Passage to America* (Calcutta, 1964). He has contributed articles to *Review of English Literature*, *College English*, *East-west Review*, and *Quest*, and has written the critical introduction to the Indian reprint of Fenimore Cooper's *The Deerslayer*. He is also a contributor to *Thoreau Abroad*, edited by Walter Harding, which is shortly to be published.

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O. K. NAMBIAR, formerly Professor of English and Head of the Department of English, Central College, has been teaching at Bangalore University under the University Grants Commission scheme for post-graduate teaching and research after his retirement in 1966. He was a visiting scholar at Columbia University under a Fulbright Grant in 1959-60. He has published *The Admirals of Calicut* (Asia, 1964), and *Walt Whitman and Yoga* (Jeevan, 1966), and is at present working on a study of Walt Whitman's religious ideas.

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